FORGOTTEN FOLK-TALES OF THE ENGLISH COUNTIES

Collected by
Ruth L. Tongue

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
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Volume 8

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COLLECTED BY
RUTH L. TONGUE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
KATHARINE BRIGGS

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1970

This edition first published in 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-84217-5 (Set)
ISBN: 978-1-138-84295-3 (Volume 8)

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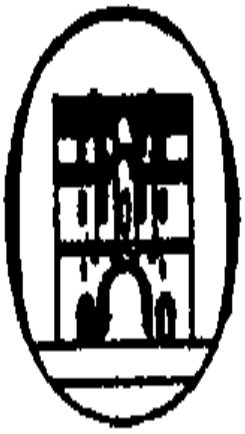
With an Introduction by
Katharine Briggs



London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

First published in 1973
First published 1970
by Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited,
Broadway House, 68–74 Carter Lane,
*London E.C.*4.
Printed in Great Britain by
Western Printing Services Ltd Bristol
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ISBN 07100 6833 6

To Sylvia Stevens, who heartened me
when recovering and worked steadily
to guide my hesitant memory back to
an enjoyable, quiet routine. It is
due to her selfless efforts that these
tales are no longer forgotten.

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Foreword

After the greater part of my folk-lore collections was destroyed by fire in 1966, through the help of my friends and the Folk Lore Society, I was asked to jot down old memories and piece together any material rescued from the charred fragments. During subsequent convalescence from eye damage there was endless time to collect and classify many old memories, and these, added to rescued items, helped to make up this collection of folk-tales of the English counties. I have named it *Forgotten Folk-tales* as many of them had been sent to me before and between the two World Wars, and some had been put by unopened in extra busy theatre work, and were indeed forgotten. Here then, offered in good faith as many of them were to me, is a motley collection of tales, many of them very old; some are oral, some are first-hand, long fireside tales, some deal with witch-lore, some with gipsy-lore. There are ninety and more of them which I trust folk-lorists and others will find of use and were worth

Ruth Lyndall Tongue

Introduction

It has long been said that the last gleanings in the field of English traditional tales have been gathered, and that there is nothing left for us but to sift already recorded matter from scattered sources. This has lately been proved to be false by the publication of the works of several notable tale-collectors. One of the chief of these is Ruth Tongue.

In the foreword to the present book Ruth Tongue explains to us how the collection it contains comes to be pieced together from half-burnt fragments of notes, and long hours of recollection in the darkness that followed operations. This is far from the professional tale-collector's method, yet the matter is very like the material that a collector may find, and count himself fortunate in finding.

Some of the tales in their entirety survived the fire that partially destroyed others, some were recollected from the author's childhood, some were taken down in shorthand at Women's Institute meetings, some were expanded from notes. Information about the various sources is generally given with the tales. Many of the tales are legends, but a few are real *Märchen.* There are a few jocular tales, called by the collector 'Rhozzums'; some are cautionary tales. Ruth Tongue has affixed no type- or motif-numbers to any of the tales. Many motif-numbers could be found, type-numbers are few. 'The Wounded Swan', for instance, is a rather grim example of a Swan Maiden tale, Type 400*. Variants of this are common in Wales, but this version comes from the opposite side of England, and was taken down in shorthand at a Cambridgeshire Women's Institute meeting. Another tale, 'The Sea-morgan's Baby', suggests the tale given literary expression in Fouqué's 'Undine'. Scattered through the book are tales which have originated and been handed down in a family of gifted storytellers—Ruth Tongue's own family. Examples are: 'The Man who went Fishing on Sunday', told by a cousin in 1912; 'Silvertoes and Timbertoes', told by another old cousin; 'In My Pocket', from a great-

grandmother in Lincolnshire; ‘Twopenny Priss’, from a great-great-grandmother, born in 1780, through three generations of transmission; ‘The Cheshire Cheese that went to Heaven’, a variant of Type 2025, ‘The Fleeing Pancake’, from an uncle; ‘The Undersea Bells’, from an uncle on the father’s side, who had collected, not originated, it. These are real traditional tales that have been handed down orally, and stored in the memories of children, but they belong to what might be called a single-strand tradition, that is, tales that have clearly originated in one inventive brain, and have not been widely diffused. Hundreds of such stories must have been told everywhere and have slipped out of the memories of their hearers. There is some family resemblance between these tales. Many of them point a moral and are in the tradition of nursery tales, quite a number are *Cante-fables*, scattered with short rhymes. Other classes of tales in this book have a wider diffusion; several versions of them have been found, and even when a complete variant is wanting, corroborative phrases show that the tales have been told elsewhere.

The tales vary considerably in their sources and geographical distribution. The richest vein is in Somerset, where Ruth Tongue has done the greater part of her collecting. Some, like ‘Billy Biter and the Round Parkin’, have passed through Somerset dialect, but were originally told by strangers. These show a strange mixture of dialects, with stray words from the north or east which stuck in the narrators minds. Others come directly from a variety of places; some twenty-eight counties are represented. In some of these the dialect is not reproduced with so sure a touch as in the Somerset tales; but this is to be expected.

The narrators of these tales are as various as their sources. There are gipsies, farm-labourers, old wives, old men, members of Women’s Institutes, schoolchildren, fishermen, grooms, soldiers and clergymen. Some of the tales have been taken down verbatim from the tellers, some have been sent by correspondents, some have been reconstructed from scattered notes.

There are more legends in the collection than folk-fictions, which accounts for the small number to which type-numbers can be assigned. This is to be expected in England, where far more folk-legends than folk-fictions have survived; but the number of real fairy-tales is surprisingly great in view of what we should expect. There is a scattering of jocular tales, among which are several jokes on the supernatural, of the same kind

as ‘Summat Queer on Batch’, which appeared in *The Folktales of England.* An example of these is ‘A Liddlin’. There are a few mere narratives, but most of even the legends are true pieces of narrative art, often intensely dramatic.

This is a rich book to browse in, perhaps the more so because the arrangement is according to no formal classification, but a matter of whim and mood, like the arrangement of de la Mare’s *Come Hither.* It will reward the folklorist with fresh material and fresh examples of widespread folk beliefs, but it can be read, and it will be read for delight by people of all ages who care more for good stories than for any theories about them.

K. M. Briggs

Part One

One Dragon-lore

1	The Solway Worm	*Cumberland*
2	The Dene Hole Dragon	*Kent/Sussex*
3	The Winged Dragon of the North	*Yorkshire*
4	Billy Biter and the Round Parkin	*Yorkshire*
5	Winlatter Rock (Matlock version)	*Derbyshire*

Two Uncanny Folk

6	Tom Tiddler's Ground	*Westmorland/Somerset*
7	The White Hart of Kilmersdon	*Somerset (Mendip)*
8	The Vixen and the Oakmen	*Cumberland*
9	The Travelling Tree	*Kent*
10	The Hyter Sprites	*Essex*

Three Rivers and Trees

11	The Asrai (two versions)	*Cheshire/Shropshire*
12	The Sea-morgan's Baby	*Somerset (Severn Estuary)*
13	The Man who went Fishing on Sunday	*Shropshire*
14	Silvertoes and Timbertoes	*Shropshire (Welsh Border)*
15	The Wonderful Wood	*Warwickshire*

Four Witches and a Saint

16	The Elder Tree Witch	*Somerset (Severn Coast)*
17	The Three Pigs	*Dorset (Wiltshire Border)*
18	Jakey Bascombe and the Cob	*Gloucestershire*
19	The Little Wee Tyke	*Northumberland (Scots Border)*
20	Counting the Cabbages	*Bedfordshire*

Five Ghosts and Evil Spirits

21	The Collingbourne Kingston Black Dog	*Wiltshire*
22	The Claverton Books	*Somerset (Wiltshire Border)*
23	The Hob who was a Watchman	*Somerset (Sedgemoor)*
24	Heme's Horn	*Berkshire*
25	The Noontide Ghost	*Somerset (Exmoor)*

Six Rhozzums and a Liddlin

26a	The Long Ladder	*Herefordshire*
b	The Men in the Turnip Field	*Somerset (Taunton Vale)*
27	No One Living	*Somerset*
28	The Sign	*Cambridgeshire*
29	Grandad's Dog	*Buckinghamshire*
30	Two Waff Tales	*Yorkshire (Scots Border)*

One

Dragon-lore

1 The Solway Worm

2 The Dene Hole Dragon

3 The Winged Dragon of the North

4 Billy Biter and the Round Parkin

5 Winlatter Rock (Matlock version)

The Solway Worm

Cumberland

A great sea-snake or worm used to come up the Solway Firth and eat all the fish and the fishermen and fowlers too, that's what my uncles at Workington used to tell me. So people starved and it would snatch any cattle come down to graze on the sea weed. Then they made a hundred stakes sharpened at each end and at low tide they went out in their coracles —Yes, tarred basket boats they said, and they drove one end of every stake in the Solway Firth where the sharp end was just nicely covered when the

tide came in. Then they all ran home to be safe and the tide came in and the worm came too and he got stuck with a hundred sharp stakes through him, my uncles said.

So they left him there to die for three days. And he bellowed till he died and the gulls and the fishes had a grand feed.

Told by James Metcalfe, a student groom of Workington, Cumberland, about 1947.

NOTES This is a version of the world-wide tale among all primitive tribes. It can be found in Polynesia, Greenland, and the Far East, as well as our own islands. The villainous enemy appears as a shark, a killer whale, a crocodile and so on. That this version is very old, the weaponless state of the people indicates—their craft being coracles, and the sharpened stakes being burnt-down trees with points carefully charred, as in African jungles many years

Variants of this tale occur among the Maori, South American Indian, and Alaskan Indian tales.

2

The Dene Hole Dragon

Kent/Sussex

There was a dragon in a Dene Hole deep down in the rocks and no one could reach him. He used to come out at night and attack travellers and eat them up and their bell-horses, then he carried all their treasure down to the Dene Hole and lay on it. Men knew he was there but no one dare venture near when he was about and they couldn’t get at him and they had no weapons but flint ones.

So he stayed there until his treasure-heap grew so big the breath of his nostrils came in sight and one brave cunning man looked in the pit and saw it. He crept away up hill and thought hard and sat by the stream all day.

Then he went back to his tribe on the hill. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘we must dig a new bed for our stream so that it runs downhill from our own dewpond and goes into the Dene Hole. That way we’ll drown the dragon and let the water out through the rocks below. Then we’ll get the treasure and be a rich powerful tribe.’

So that is what they did.

The dragon was drowned and when they moved some rocks below and the water rushed out his body floated away, and the birds had it. But the tribe found a great heap of silver and grew rich and powerful.

Told by a Scouter at Gilwell Camp, about 1932.

NOTES The silver was probably tin and the travellers Phoenician traders.
A very early tale, later given a Norse setting.

3

The Winged Dragon of the North

Yorkshire

They say that a fiery winged dragon came out of the north and made his den high up in the cliffside.

He used to wait till a treasure-train came along the Kings Highway below and then he would swoop down upon it. Men and pack-train ran in terror when the great fiery dragon came down at them with his wings flapping. None ever escaped and his cave grew so full of treasure that as he lay on it his head could be seen out.

No one ever went along the road but some brave men quietly rolled some great rocks above his den, and gave them a push right down onto his cruel head and that settled him.

Miss Lily Kingston, Langtoft, Lowthorpe, Yorkshire, 1915.

NOTES There is an echo of a Norse saga in this depleted legend.

4

Billy Biter and the Round Parkin

Yorkshire

Here be a tale young Charley, the Yorkshire undergroom, used to tell. There was a dragon who lived in a deep gully and no one else cared about living near him except old Mrs Greenaway, in a cottage in the woods above and she were a ‘gifted’ woman as had a way with warts and suchlike so maybe she had a way with a dragon—anyway up there she stayed safe and sound, and down there he stayed too, getting hungrier and hungrier. The farmers had moved back along over the hill to the village with all their stock. The hill grazing was rich but no one with their full senses let good beasts fatten to feed a dragon. For that matter an farmer could come a snack like.

On t’other zide of gully right atop the hill were Bill Biter, the travelling tailor, and folks kept a-telling Billy ‘twere real dangerous to live there. They all had a liking for Billy Biter and not one a good word for Hepzibah, his wife, and her girt black-jack. Billy’s cottage had been the most welcoming in the parish while his old mother lived. All the folks found some excuse to go a-visiting up the hill. There were always a kettle ready to boil hanging on the crook, and a good back-log burning in hearth and old Tom Puss a-washing himself in the chimbley corner. They brought in the logs and carried fresh water in for her when Billy was away on his tailoring and ‘twas believed old Mrs Greenaway kept an eye on the dear soul too. Anyways the cottage were a picture while she lived, but when she died was different.

A man needs a home to come back to after his day’s labour, so poor Billy he went and married Hepzibah and everyone said she proper terrified him into it. He were only a little fellow, kind as they come, and she were six foot high and so thin as a yard of pumpwater—but ‘twasn’t pumpwater as Hepzibah were always a-pouring down her gullet from her black-jack. The folk reckoned she only married Billy because the cottage wasn’t a half a mile down to the inn and every day Hepzibah would come staggering and all adraggle-tail to get black-jack filled and if she got back up whoame ‘twas a month’s wonder. There wadn’t no fire till Billy trudged home and a faggot with him. He’d fetch water for the kettle and swept up a bit and old Tom Puss could sit in a warm chimney corner for a two-dree minutes afore Billy took the wheelbarrow and went to look for Hepzibah. There were times when she were fast asleep halfway home and black-jack were empty beside her, times she were nearly home and not such a troublesome load for a bone-weary little man, and times she was really to home and all

asprawl in old Mrs Biter's rocking-chair that Hepzibah had sat right through the seat of, and then Billy and Tom Puss went a-tip-toe while they kept one eye open in case she moved. When she moved a foot they was both out of the door and atop of the roof where she were too bone-idle to reach, and there they sat the whole night cuddled to chimney for a bit of warmth. Folks talked and Billy went on same way, too tired to do ought about it until one day he met Mrs Greenaway.

'Where be your pay-money, Billy?' she say and somehow Billy give it over—she give him a silver sixpence back. 'That'll all be down Hepzibah's dreat by tomorrow,' she say. 'Get this bite of bread and cheese inside And Biter went a-home fine.

He give Hepzibah the sixpence and then he joined Tom Puss up against the chimney-pot. Hepzibah were too handy with a broom-handle for comfort and she could run a deal too fast for his thin liddle tailor's legs. Bye and bye there was no smoke up chimney and cottage windows was dark and old Mrs Greenaway noted it—and the dragon below give a girt groan he were that hungry but he didn't stir out for all that. Next night 'twas the same. Hepzibah were asprawl across drashel [threshold] so Billy went up on roof to join Tom Puss and sat there in the rain and Mrs Greenaway noted that too and the Dragon give another hollow but he didn't stir neither.

The third night they give Billy Biter a good Yorkshire tea at the farm afore sending him on his way and he'd kept back a bit in his pocket for Tom Puss but Varmer's wife had her own notions. They was all fond of Billy Biter. He had been a merry little soul, he could sing tunable at his work and dance dapper and laugh like a pixy, so now she had packed him a load of good vittles. 'If Hepzibah can't trouble herself to cook 'en, you up and vind a time and place,' she said and Varmer bound a good, dry faggot atop. "Tidn so heavy as wheelbarrow load,' he say, and watch Billy Biter go into the vog looking like a walking hod-me-dod [snail].

Hod-me-dod or no Billy made good time until he smelled summat so good it somehow brought him out of his way to Mrs Greenaway's wood.

She come to her door. 'Come in Billy Biter, you and your good vittles and faggot. Hepzibah won't be wanting 'en. Hand over.' Well she was old and had been good to his old mother and 'twas cruel hard to go hungry as Billy well knew but for all that he hands over the load. But Mrs

Greenaway she don't trouble herself to undo it, she just shakes summat like flour over it. 'I been a-bakin' , ' she say. 'Can 'ee smell my parkin?'

(Parkin, Charley say, be a Yorkshire girt square ginger cake. Fie don't think much of our thin gingerbread. He say it should be square and sticky, but for all that he eat enough of it.)

Billy could smell nothing else nor could the hungry dragon far below. 'I'll give 'ee a mouthvil to warm your road whoame,' and with that she cut a huge slice for Billy from the square baking sheet on the hearth. 'A bit for Tom Puss to go in your pocket so well—and this in corner be for Hepzibah *alone—no one else mind.'* And with that she broke off a girt corner, wrapped it up in clean leaves and laid it on the load. "Tisn't vor such as you and Tom Puss, mind now—on your way and sleep well

And out went Billy full of good food and with his own girt wedge of warm parkin to nibble on his trudge on home. He were even full of hope that Hepzibah might take a fancy to a hot meal and cook'n vor the once and so 'twas no wonder that misty moisty night he step right over the edge of the dragon's gully, and down he went arsey-varsey [head-over-heels] almost down his gullet too. He landed on his load which were softer than all the oven-hot rock down there and up against a girt, red light that blinked. 'That be my eye you be poking your faggot in,' say dragon. 'Let's have a proper look at what I'm to dine on.' Poor Billy's knees chattered and he dropped his wedge of parkin afore dragon's nose. Out come a girt, hot tongue and golloped it while even Tom Puss half-a-mile uphill could hear the clatter of Billy Biter all atremble below. But the parkin just wouldn't gollop—it stuck to dragon's teeth and he found it so welcome as flowers in May. 'What do 'ee call this?' he say droo the stick chumble. '1-p-parkin,' say Billy still atwitter and all adrench wi' cold sweat. For all that his load were beginning to scorch gentle. 'Then go back and bring me some more,' say dragon, sneezing out a crumb as were tickling his gullet. That sneeze fair blew Billy Biter clean out of the gully and atop of Tom Puss by the cold cottage chimney, and rope on his load were so scorched droo that it broke and down inside chimney tumbled the whole load on the dying embers. It just passed Hepzibah's head where she lay all asprawl, her shoes all untied, her skirts atatter and greasy and black-jack empty alongside. The smell of her own girt corner of parkin made her nose twitch and she sat up to gobble it, then she got up and kicked faggot which were

beginning to catch and crackle a bit. ‘You come down here, Billy,’ she yelled up chimney, ‘drowing cake at your poor wife. What be it anyway?’

‘P-p-parkin,’ say Billy coming down carefully. Tom Puss he didn’t stir, not he. ‘Parkin!’ yells Hepzibah. ‘Give I the sack I’ll show thee how to bake parkin.’ And she did too ! Billy were kept on the gallop filling pig-trough with the dough, she kicked and trampled till it were ready to use and Tom Puss watched down the chimney in between the smoke. ‘She’ve a girt dollop of dough on a baking sheet zo long and *round* as a wagon wheel and ‘tis still zwellin. Parkins is square,’ he ‘I’m here.’

‘When ‘tis cooked us’ll see,’ say Hepzibah. Believe it or not, in two minutes that girt, *round* parkin were baked and zmelling rich and strange. Billy took to the roof when Hepzibah hauled the hugeous round out of the blaze without a burn to it. ‘I’ll show ‘ee broom end,’ shrieks Hepzibah, ‘when I comes back vrom showing the old witch how to bake parkin!’ And she tumbled over a shoe-lace and out of the door.

She lost one shoe, then she lost t’other, then she lost the girt, round parkin, and it went a-bowling and a-rolling downwards towards gully where dragon were still waiting hopeful and Hepzibah staggered after it yelling like a flock of crows. The village come out to look-see. They seed Billy’s cottage lit up and they seed the girt, round parkin a-bouncing and jouncing down over and they seed Hepzibah run right over the edge of the gully and they heard dragon give a gollop, as he swallowed her. “Twadn’t a very tasty morsel,’ he say, and then the girt, round parkin what had been a spinning and wig-wagging on the edge above plump down afore his nose. ‘ Cor !’ say dragon and he bit into it hearty that he couldn’t say no more and he never didn’t on account his teeth were that stuck he couldn’t only snort.

When the folk see what come of it they all runned for sledgehammers, and pickforks and axes and such but how to get into gully without being fried they couldn’t tell. Dragon he settled it vor ‘en nicely. He took off away down to the sea to wash the girt, round parkin vrom between his teeth where it were clinging so loving as an ivy-bine. Well the folk followed and they was just in time to see dragon ker-vlop right down in deep water and stick his head under, then they run and give his nose arf-dozen whisterpoops as stopped his breath and run back to safety, and avore dragon come to there were a girt oncome of waves and he drounded then and there.

When folks come rejoicing back past Billy's cottage, door were wide open, house were all clean and tidy—there were vittles on table, a kettle on the crook, Tom Puss awashing himself in chimbley chortler, and a nice, *square* parkin on baking sheet avore the fire and Billy mending the seat of the rocking-chair--and I don't doubt old Mrs Greenaway saw that too.

Charley say dragon's bones turned into a long stretch of rock folk up there call Filey Brigg, but I never heard of 'en.

Told in a Somerset stable by William Webber, a groom of Taunton, between 1905 and 1907.

NOTES This tale is published in *Folk Lore,* Vol. 78, Summer 1967.

5

Winlatter Rock

Derbyshire

Matlock version: *The Missionary Monk and the Dragon*
The Devil came out of the north. He turned himself into a fiery dragon and laid waste all the land, crawling over hills and dales and woods and farms.

He had got as far as the hills above Chesterfield when he saw a man. Just one man with bare feet and a tattered gown and he didn't run away. He climbed atop of Winlatter Rock and spread his arms wide so that he made a cross of himself and the Devil was afraid of him and sent a tem-to blow him but he never moved.

Three times the Devil tried and the priest stood so firm his feet sunk into the rock and it held him up. Then the Devil ran away back to the north and the down and told Chesterfield how he had saved it.

People used to walk up to the Rock and look at the two holes his feet made and say their prayers.

My grandmother says it crumbled and was lost years ago.

And my father—he's a farmer—says the snows and frost widened the crack and broke it off hundreds of years ago, but he knew one old man who knew this tale. Oh yes, Winlatter Rock is still there.

From Derbyshire and Yorkshire Guides and Rangers, 1928; also from D. Medland, 1920s.

NOTES This is one of several versions of the Winlatter Rock tale. See also ‘The Three Valiant Lads’, Pt Three, No. s.

Two

Uncanny Folk

6 Tom Tiddler's Ground

7 The White Hart of Kilmersdon

8 The Vixen and the Oakmen

9 The Travelling Tree

10 The Hyter Sprites

6

Tom Tiddler’s Ground

Westmorland/Somerset

Tom Tiddler were a-scaring they blackey-tops and he come on a lump of gold out in middle of field. He look all around and weren’t nobody about to tell ‘twas theirs, so Tom he say, ‘Finds. Keeps. But ‘tis likely fairy gold!’ So he hid ‘en in the hole by their thorn-tree. Then he go on a bit and he find a lump of silver and he done the same again. Then he go on with

his labour and he find a liddle bag of pennies. ‘That’s my size,’ say Tom, so he keep ‘un, and by and by he buys a farm. Nobody questioned about a heap of pennies saved up over the years. Farm did well till someone overlooked ‘un and cows begun pining, so Tom he up and off to the Thorn.

‘What’s come of the fairises.

‘Have ‘ee a bit of luck to spare?’ say Tom. ‘I did return thy gold and silver.’

‘Ask all as you go,’ say the fairises. ‘Someone have come and a-stole it

So Tom he goes off, and he sees a pyatt [a magpie—this denotes very bad luck], so he crosses his feet and spit and then say mannerly, ‘Please have ‘ee see the fairises’ gold?’

‘Gold? Gold?
Oh no. Oh no.
I never steal gold
So off you go,’ say the pyatt.

So next he come on Mr Fox, and he’m pretty certain by now ‘tis old Wizard Black, but he’d agot salt in his pocket so he say, ‘Please, Mr Fox, have ‘ee seed fairises’ gold?’

And Mr Fox snarled to him *‘No!* Be off!’ and then Tom Tiddler knowed the thief.

Well, he told the huntsman, and hounds chased ‘en right over Tom Tiddler’s ground, and the Fairy Thorn catched in his coat and held ‘un for hounds to kill—and that ended Mr Fox.

Then they go look under Fairy Thorn and there were a gurt heap of withered leaf.

Now Wizard Black died sudden, so that ended the gold and silver.

And Tom Tiddler’s farm went well, and bird-boys sing about ‘en to this day. And that ends my tale.

This is from a Somerset Mendip version (from the area near the mining country around Radstock), and wasfound in 1964 in my early 1920 collecting papers. It was told in the Somerset vernacular by William Webber, a groom of Taunton, 1905-7.

NOTES It is doubtful whether this is a chapbook tale or exists as an oral tradition in Westmorland. It came down to Somerset by way of shepherds mountain herds to the Western Hills.

The following Mendip bird-scaring call was sung to me by an old Mendip labourer who had used it himself in 1889, and is evidence of the widespread tradition and knowledge of Tom Tiddler beyond the well-known game:

Shua O! Shua O! shoo! Shua O! Shua O!
Shoo, shoo, shoo! all ye birds,
Out of my master’s ground, into Tom Tiddler’s ground,
Shoo! all ye birds. Hilly-ho!

See also *Word-Lore*, Vol. II, published by the Folk Press, 1927.

7

The White Hart of Kilmersdon

Somerset (Mendip)

In ancient times there were many kind of deer that wandered in the forest near Kilmersdon, and among them sometimes ran a magical white hind.

She was rarely seen, but any woodsman who saw even a flash of her whiteness was fortunate and happy for days.

Many seekers tried to get a full view of her but without success.

But one May evening the Lord of Kilmersdon was riding back over Mendip, full of care, for there was pestilence among his people, when, before him, through the forest, sped the white hart, the fairy hind.

It led him on for more than a mile, and then it vanished, and with it went all his fear and heaviness.

His heart was filled with great happiness all his life, and in gratitude he built the Lady Chapel at Kilmersdon Church to dedicate his joy to Heaven.

From a member of Kilmersdon W.I., 1962.

NOTES It has been suggested that this tale—a compound of a monastic legend and of traditional fairy-lore—was inspired by the marriage of one of the Bottreux (the residing house) with a lady whose badge was a white hart. The Somerset Archaeological Society, however, in its notes on the Bottreux beasts (1964 and 1965), lists only an antelope among those beasts to be found at Kilmersdon Church.

8

The Vixen and the Oakmen

Cumberland

A fox had been hunted all day and the hounds were getting closer and do what she might she couldn't throw them off. 'Jump up and climb up me and run the stone said the hawthorn tree.

'I don't think I could jump up anywhere now,' said she, 'but thank you kindly.'

'There's a water-gap in the stone wall,' said the hawthorn, 'and the other side is the forest. The does.'

'I'm not a hedgehog,' said the fox, 'but thank you kindly.' Then she heard the hounds and squeezed herself inside and there she stuck and the hunt came by. They couldn't see her easily for she tucked in her brush and edged a bit more under the thick, stone wall.

'The tip of your brush is sticking out,' said the tree. 'Push your nose out as far as you like the other side of the wall. They'll have to go two miles round to find a gap to come round and see that.'

So she gave a wriggle and left most of her shoulder pelt on the stones but she got through, and even then she stopped to thank the hawthorn before she limped off.

Only one great hound heard her and came snuffling the small water-gap. Then he reached a great paw in and lifted his head to bay, but the hawthorn dropped a bunch of paigles [haws] down his throat and made him cough instead. 'You give her a chance,' the tree told him. 'You're twice her size. Go round if you want to catch her up. She may be a vixen but she's got good manners. She doesn't cough and splutter all over my roots. Be off!' And the hound went.

But the fox was very lame and it wasn't long before she heard men again. 'I *must* rest,' she said and cowered in the brake ferns. But these men had axes and whispered, even in the forest, and she heard what they said and when they crept on their way she limped on hers, trying to hasten, for again she heard hounds.

'O Holly Tree, block the way behind me, please!' she said.

But the holly tree was a barren holly and wicked. ‘I will if you come here,’ he told her, but she just looked at him.

‘My poor little paws are too sore to walk on your leaves, Sir—you might hang me on your branches, ‘and she went well away from his clutch.

The hounds drew nearer again. Then she saw the great oak and crawled to it.

‘Please open and let me in. I bring news,’ she whined. The Oakmen don’t believe a fox’s word, but they guard all forest beasts so they pulled her safe inside where she lay panting. At last she gasped ‘Your mistletoe bough—men with axes—going to cut it down—they said so—but they’re scared. Am I in time to save it?’

‘Did you come through all these dangers to tell us that?’ said the Oakmen. She had.

‘Then we’ll forget Farmer Gregg’s geese and ducks and hens,’ they told her. ‘We don’t shelter thieves but we *can* shelter a true friend. The hunt has gone past and away, and now you must go too. Wipe your sore paws in our oaktree rainpool.’ So she did and her coat grew again and her were healed.

‘Keep away from the Barren Holly,’ they said—she meant to—‘and never come here again.’

And she was off home to her den in the crags like a red flash and curled up and sound asleep in another minute.

When she woke Mr Fox had just brought home a fat goose. ‘One of Farmer Gregg’s, my love,’ he said. ‘He won’t need it and you do. He’s hanging high on the branches of a barren holly in the forest and another man with him. Eat the goose, love, and I’ll just go back and bring *a* duck for supper.’

Told by a soldier stationed in the Lake District, 1948.

NOTES The Barren Holly is credited, like the Willow, with being a murdering tree, and the country people say that one should always plant a pair of hollies to allow for cross-fertilization.

Oakmen are kindly forest dwarfs akin to the guardian brownies and pixies of other countries who care for the beasts.

For other references, see Beatrix Potter, *The Fairy Caravan,* London, 1952. J. R. R. Tolkien makes dynamic use of similar beliefs in *The Lord of the Rings*

9

The Travelling Tree

Kent

There was a countryman who had to take a journey one autumn night. The clouds kept covering the moon and he couldn't see his way. He wasn't very happy about finding his path and he felt sure he wasn't alone, for once he heard something laugh. "Tis just a tree creaking,' he told himself, and being a stubborn Kentish chap, he went on. Then the clouds covered the moon and the wind blew and the rain came down and he couldn't see a handsbreadth in front of him, so he tried to find shelter for a bit.

There wasn't a hedge on those hills, but he thought he glimpsed a tree, threshing its branches in the gale. He groped for it but the clouds kept covering the moon and when he climbed up it wasn't there, but further on. Well, he walked after it nigh a mile and again he heard a laugh like a creaking branch, but being stubborn he wouldn't believe his own ears and followed on again. He walked and walked about three miles and was blown all about and drenched and icy cold, but at last he got a hand on it, and sunk down, worn out, in its shelter, and huddled his cloak to him and began to warm up.

Then he heard a voice : 'I dunno what you plan to do,' said the tree, 'but I'm getting wet to the bone. I'm going home to a nice fire.'

And it went.

From a Kentish correspondent, about 1930. I also heard a variant during the war from an evacuee from Kent, 1941.

NOTES A Robin Goodfellow tale, known in the seventeenth century and still remembered. 18

10

The Hyter Sprites

Essex

One of my mother’s aunts away back [this could easily mean 200 years ago] married an Essex man they called Hyter John and he were a pack-man. There wadn’t no carts their way, tracks was all mixey-mirey and yew did need a good pack-’oss to get a load safe droo they there moors. Venses they did call ‘en with gurt reeds and rhines and deep holes across the highways, all a-brim with muck. Proper dangerous ‘twas—folk cud be a-drownded there—so they was all glad of a proper, careful packman to fetch and carry their goods to market each week and never lose nothing vor ‘en.

There were one dryish bit as was only walked by daylight—sand and gravel ‘twas with high banks full of burries [burrows] of they liddle, brown sand-swallows. They’d fly out from under foot as ‘ee passed and someat else would fly too. All sandy coloured they was with green eyes, but nobody bided to see ‘en close tew.

Hyter sprites was the name they went by, but nobody talked about ‘en at all—’twadn't considered lucky, any more than us West Somerset do talk too free about the pixies. Reckon they was some kind of kin. They could appear man-size to play their tricks but most times they was about knee-high. And if ‘ce had to travel night-times, what with they reeds and water and green eyes all a-watch, it wadn’t very nice.

Hyter John and Mag his mare didn’t mind ‘en a bit—not since they wade into a bad place and fish out one o’ their babies as had valled in, poor liddle dear. Zo they liked John more’n a bit though he never seed more than the one liddle baby—but night-times in winter there’d be green eyes all along keeping Mag safe on road.

So Mother’s girt-aunt knowed he was a-being watched over and was real thankful. You see there were someone else a-watching his comings and goings—and they designed to ill-wish him and break his good name. There were a sly, wicked creature folk called Cunning Borley and kept well away vrom, and he waited for years to catch a Hyter sprite for a soul-slave*—and then it were only a little baby sprite too young to be of much use, and being in a wicked rage he drowed it into the black waters and left ‘en to drownd. Well, Hyter John and Mag got ‘en out and left ‘en safe vor the mother to vind, and they Hyter sprites didn’t never vorget and Hyter John he prospered in his honesty.

Folk trusted ‘en and he always kept in mind what his wife say (and, ‘tis what 1 tell ‘ee, mind):

Give a Promise
Live a Promise
Do very well.

Make a Promise
Break a Promise
Go down to Hell.

So Cunning Borley he tried all ways to trick him into a broken promise, but he just couldn’ do it.

Then one May-tide the rain come down all day and evening too and Hyter John were clarty [muddy] belt-high and Mag went belly-deep every step. But vor all that they got all the way to market and sold they goods and start for home with the market money and two little kegs of brandy vor Squire a-swung on Hyter John’s belt as he walked. He could ha’ rode but Mag would ha’ been shoulder-deep then and slow as a hod-me-dod [snail] and he were being very careful indeed.

My mother’s great-aunt she tells him that morning, ‘When I went out at daybreak there were a hurgon† going widdershins round our cow and calf so I run vor salt-box and drowed a handvul at un—Yew orter zeed thic hurgon make vor geat—Couldn’ zee en in lane when I had a look-see but Cunning Borley he happed to be passing by and cussing terrible. Limping bad he were. There were a vlat iron kept in zalt-box. S’pose I drowed that too. Now promise not to go anywhere with the market money but leave they kegs vor Squire and come straight home.’

And Hyter John he promised.

But half-a-mile vrom Squire’s, just by the inn, Mag near lost a shoe and shoes cost money.

So Hyter John he shouts for the ostler to tap it back while he stands all a-drench in the rain holding Mag. But no ostler came. They was all fast asleep by the gurt vire. So Hyter John he tie up Mag for a whips-while and go in to get ostler and he feels the heat of tha vire and next thing he knows is someone a-shaking him and there was the very smallest serving maid all in a sand-coloured

‘Yew’ve lost your labour Hyter John and your good name too.’ And when the mist and heat clear vrom his sight he found the market money and was

‘What will you do?’ say she.

‘Go and tell Squire. I must pay ‘en all back every penny of it. I broke my promise to them all.’

‘You are ill-wished,’ she.

‘No matter, I broke my promise.’ And out into the rain again he went and vound Mag zo clean washed and half-drownded as he were, and off he went to Squire and then trudged whoame well-nigh heart-broke to tell his wife.

She ups and comforts ‘en. ‘Squire be a merciful man. We’ll earn enough between us to pay all back so soon as may be.’ Then she say sudden, ‘What colour was her eyes?’

‘Sort of green And she were little and in brown.’

‘We’ll get to pay every bit back, never fear, my dear.’ And they did, between ‘en.

She made rush mats and hats to sell so fast you’d ha’ thought she had lots of helpers, and John he make thatching spars and pegs and cut loads of new rushes for the town floors and Mag seemed to go dry-shod there and back so vast as a galloping pony. And every penny was paid back—. poor folk first and Squire last.

‘All in seven days,’ says Squire. ‘Somebody likes you both. Be off and get your old mare shod with a criss-cross and Cunning Borley can’t bother We’ll him Else will.’

The next time Mag went past the burries ‘twas a fine May night and what should they hear but twittering voices:

‘Hyter John, Hyter John,
Look in the burrow,
You’ll be as rich as a king,
Tomorrow.’

Hyter John looked and there were Squire’s two kegs, still full. Cunning Borley had come limping to take them away from where he’d hid them. He yelled with envy and rage to see himself found out. Then he waved the bag of market money : ‘But I got all this !’

Would ‘ee believe there come a cloud of they little sand-swallows a-blattering and a-blinding him so that he steps back right off path and into the of ‘en all.

Well Hyter John and Mag gets him out after he come up dree times all a-muck and without the money. Then Hyter John and Mag go whoame

And Cunning Borley he had company every step he limped whoame and it laughed and laughed and had hundreds of green eyes.

This is one of ‘Annie’s Granny’s’ tales, told to her in 1860 and told to me in 1909. (For the identity and character of ‘Annie’s Granny’ see my book, The Chime Child, *1967.)*

The original copy of the tale was burnt, and this recording is mainly from fragments.

NOTES Hyter sprites are helpful and good, as opposed to the East Anglian yarthkins, which are sinister earth-spirits.

Fairy people are often associated with birds, or ‘shape-shifting’.

See also ‘The Wounded Swan’ (Pt Two, No. 13), and ‘True John and Greedy Jack’ (Pt Three, No. 6).

* A screever, or an interpreter and hypnotized actor, to risk the danger of cast spells. See ‘Chimbley Charley’, *Somerset Folk Lore,* Vol. II, published by the Folk Lore Society, County Folk Lore Series, No. 8, 196E.

† Hedgehog, also known as vuzz-peg (i.e., furze-pig). 20

Three

Rivers and Trees

11 The Asrai
12 The Sea-morgan’s Baby
13 The Man who went Fishing on Sunday
14 Silvertoes and Timbertoes
15 The Wonderful Wood

11

The Asrai

Cheshire

Version 1

There was a poor fisherman who went fishing one night on a great mere. It was so big and so deep that people said it was unlucky to fish there as it might disturb the Asrai who lived at the bottom of it.

The Asrai, the old folk said, were a race of water-fairies who brought good fortune to the country round about. They were gentle and good and very shy and no one ever saw them. They lived deep down in the mere and were like beautiful men and women but their hair was green like floating water-weeds and their hands and feet were webbed. Once every hundred years at night they would come to the surface to look at the moon and

grow and that would be when someone saw one, so that folk still remembered they really were there. They said, too, that if an Asrai looked on the light of day it died.

The moon was shining as the poor fisherman drew in his net and it was very heavy and he saw he had caught an Asrai.

She was strange and beautiful and he gazed on her in delight. She begged him to let her go but he said her words were only like ripples on the lake shore and he wanted to show her to his children. So he bound her and the touch of her cool, wet hands burned him all his life.

She wept sadly into her long green hair, and in rough pity he flung an armful of wet rushes over her and rowed down lake. He would take her to the great lord's castle and *he* could keep her in the fountains there and show her off to his noble guests. She would be in water, thought the fisherman to himself, trying to forget how shallow the fountains were.

So he rowed long and steadily as the moon sank. And as it went down the sighs and gentle cries of the Asrai grew less. They had rung in his ears like little, lamenting waves; he was glad he couldn't hear them any more, even if the great lord would pay him well.

At sun-rise he reached the end of the lake and in pride pulled aside the pile of sodden covering reeds.

There was nothing below them but the wet floor-boards.

From the Whitchurch Collection (Shropshire).

Cheshire, Shropshire or the North-West

Version 2

A fisherman was out with a on the lake at the dark of the night.

As the moon rose, he moved his boat into the shadows. His net grew heavy, and he had trouble to pull it in. When the full moon shone out he saw that he had caught an Asrai. It was a wonderfully beautiful, gentle creature to look at.

He had heard old people say these fairies only came up from their cool, deep homes below the water once in a hundred years, to look at the moon and to grow.

As this one seemed about the size of a twelve-year maid, the man could not guess how very, very old it must be.

He spoke to it, for it did not make him afraid, and it seemed to beg him to let it go, but its speech only sounded to him like the ripples among the lake-side sedges. The fisherman had half-a-mind to set it free, but he wanted to show it to his children, and then he began to think how the rich folk in the castle might like to show it in their fishponds, and would pay him well. So he hardened his heart, and began the long row homewards.

The Asrai got one arm out of the net, and pointed again and again to the waning moon, and then laid a hand on his arm,—'like cool foam, the touch was,' he said later. But it seemed that his human warmth hurt it, for it shrank away from him, and huddled in the bottom of the boat, covering itself with its long, green hair. He was afraid the light of day might be too strong for it, and covered it with wet rushes. The lake was long, and the sun had risen by the time he got to his own creek.

He drew the boat ashore, and lifted the rushes away from where the Asrai had lain. His net was empty, and a damp patch was all there was left of it. But the arm that it had touched was icy cold, all the rest of his life, and nothing could warm it.

From the author's recollections of an account in local papers published between 1875 and 1912.

NOTES The main interest in this rare legend lies in the very clear description of these gentle, shy water people. They seem akin to the Welsh morgans (lake spirits) in their love of deep water, and to the Highland fuath (a malicious and dangerous fairy) in their inability to live in daylight. But they are far less dangerous than the savage fuath, or even the Norse 'nick', and seem to belong to an offshoot of the gentle and ancient elf-folk, despite their selkie-like webbed hands and feet. (The selkies were gentle and benevolent seal people of the Orkneys.)

One version of this tale speaks of the Asrai as the size of a twelve-year-old child, 'so he could guess how very old she must be'. Presumably the Asrai were born very small, and grew gradually throughout their lives.

The following passages contain further references to this rare and almost lost belief:

(a) A Birmingham friend told me that in the 1950s, on a family holiday to the Cheshire—Shropshire area, her sister's little boy went fishing with a very old great-uncle. When they came to a mere, the old man drew the child away. 'Too deep for either of us,' he said. "Tis deep enough for an Asrey [Asrai].' The little boy asked at home what an Asrai was. His family thought it might be a local name for a newt or an eel.

Correspondence, 13 September 1965 (*destroyed by fire*)

(b) 'We had a Welsh maid from Flint at "The Laurels" and she would never go near the canal after midday. If the moon were coming to the full she called it an "Asrai night".'

'Aunt Elsie' Robinson, Whitchurch 1907–65

(c) 'There was an old man near Brown Moss who had a red burn across his wrist which never went all his life. Nobody spoke of it aloud, but my grandfather's folk who knew him said he had tried to hold an Asrai prisoner.'

E. Jones, Brown Moss, Whitchurch 1899

(d) 'She had a soft voice to her like an Asrey.'

Katie Evans, maid, Whitchurch 1916

12

The Sea-morgan's Baby

Somerset (Severn Coast)

There was a fisherman come down in the owl-light into St Audries Bay. He'd heard someone singing down there in the dark and he were curious. So he come down by all a tip-toe. But he couldn't be quiet enough if he tried and the sea-morgans was all away off the rocks and into the tide, but in their hurry they left a baby morgan a-kicking and chuckling under the cliff waterfall and the fisherman found her.

His heart was sore for a little daughter he'd just left in Watchet churchyard and his wife's heart were abroke. So he takes the baby morgan whoame up over to the farm and puts her in the empty cradle, and his wife

took to her at once though she couldn't ever get the little creature's hair dry—not properly dry even in sun and hill wind and it smelled of the sea.

The baby grew up like they all do, and, except that she would be forever paddling and dabbling in the spring-pond and the trout stream, she made 'en a real good daughter till a neighbour came pushing her nose in.

'Dear, dear, how wet your hair be. Go and dry it like a Christian!' But the girl just laughed. Then she had to go and say, 'A girt girl like you a-paddling in the spring-pond an't Christian at all. You go down to the sea and have a swim there.'

The old couple bustled her out and as she went she heard a queer song coming from the far-away sea. 'What ever be that?' she asked, but they wouldn't say and she heard it again behind her and it was the girl singing. 'That's my song,' she say. 'Someone wants me. There will be a storm tonight.'

Well, that meddler ran and roused the Doniford and Staple men to chase away this witch—but the girl ran away from them all, laughing. They couldn't catch up with her, and then they heard the song and the waves was thundering on the rocks and they bided where they was up on the cart-track. They heard her singing as she ran out along the rocks and then a great wave took her and no one ever saw her again.

Told in a Watchet teashop on a wet day in about 1916, by a member of a party outing. She said, 'My grandmother used to tell this tale when we were all little.'

NOTES The Severn estuary sea-people are sometimes known as 'morgans' like the Welsh lake-spirits. They often have green hair.

See Katharine M. Briggs and Ruth L. Tongue (eds.), *Folk Tales of England* (196s) No. 19, p. 54.

13

The Man who went Fishing on Sunday

Shropshire

There was once a man they called Jack the Fool. Oh, he had all his wits about him and a good few more, but he just couldn't be happy unless he was up to some game to make the neighbours stare and cause a lot of talk and set him grinning. One Sunday when the church bells began to ring he came down the stairs in his work clothes.

'''Tis Sunday,' said his old mother.

'I know that,' says Jack the Fool with a grin.

'And the church bells are ringing,' said his old mother.

'I can hear 'em,' says he with another grin.

'You'll be late for church today,' says his old mother.

'I'm not going,' says he, 'I'm going fishing!'

'Fishing on *Sunday*!' says his old mother, all taken aback at this dangerous folly of his. 'You've had all the week to fish.'

'Fish weren't biting,' says he.

"Tis a mortal sin,' said she.

'Then I'll have the Devil's own luck,' said he, and he took his tackle and went out grinning from ear to ear. And she was that frightened she was in too much dread to say one word more in case the church bells stopped ringing and then such words would be terribly dangerous, but she did call after him in warning:

You will
Down Below!

Jack the Fool didn't listen but went and sat on the bank of the mere and sorted his tackle, and the church bells went on ringing and all the neighbours passed by to church.

'Fishing on Sunday!' said they in horror. ''Tis a mortal sin!'

'Then I'll have the Devil's own luck,' says Jack the Fool, grinning all the more.

But at that they all backed away and cried:

You will go
Down Below!

And they hurried away to church in case the bells stopped ringing.

'It's a bit warmish Down There,' Jack the Fool shouted after them, 'I'm happy as I am,' and he launched his boat out on the mere.

The sun shone and the church bells rang, and Jack the Fool caught a fine fish. ‘I said my luck was in,’ he thought, ‘and so it is.’

And it *was*. He fished and he fished and he quite forgot it was Sunday, or where he was; he just went on baiting his hook again and again, and soon his boat was loaded with fish and his grin grew so wide it almost met at the back.

Then the church bells stopped and the sun went in and *he caught Old Nick*! All ready and waiting for him, wet and shiny and scaly with smoke coming out of his nostrils.

‘Oh dear! Oh dear!’ moaned Jack the Fool. ‘You can’t come near. ‘Tis a Sunday.’

‘The bells have stopped ringing,’ said Old Nick.

‘But I’m a Christian soul,’ said Jack the Fool and his teeth chattered like pebbles in a bucket.

‘And chose to go fishing instead of going to church to pray,’ said Old Nick and he put one wet hand on the boat side.

Well, at that, Jack the Fool was so terrified he couldn’t remember a single prayer, all he could say was, ‘Oh dear! Oh dear! I’m cold with fear.’ ‘You won’t be cold long,’ says Old Nick and *he tipped the boat right over.*

And they did go
Down Below!

So there *isn’t any more to tell you.*

My third cousin, Matthias Johns, told this tale to my cousins Patty and John and myself on the lawn of mother’s old Whitchurch home one summer afternoon in 1912. The mere was either Ellesmere or a local mere near Whitchurch. My mother subsequently wrote it down to cheer me up during a mastoid convalescence.

NOTES This was originally a Severn River or a Welsh Border tale. I have heard briefer versions of the story in the Severn and Wye area, but its locality is usually told as Severn, the boat is a coracle and the Fool spearing salmon. There is a faintly-recalled Somerset version of this near Clevedon, where they say the Devil rose and drowned the Fool in the Tidal Bore. In this version the Devil was caught in his salmon net.

14

Silvertoes and Timbertoes

Shropshire (Welsh Border)

Timbertoes was a tree and Silvertoes was a tree.

Timbertoes was a mighty oak and Silvertoes was a graceful young birch, and *he* grew on the edge of the forest and *she* grew by the mere. One day the Wind came by and stopped to chat with Timbertoes. ‘I gave you a wild night last night, old friend,’ he said. ‘I hope you stood up to it.’

‘I think I lost a small top bough, but that’s the first in fifty years,’ said Timbertoes. ‘It was injured as a twig and was always weakly.’

‘*I* only lost a few leaves,’ interrupted Silvertoes quite rudely, ‘but I can still dance a beautiful dance. I am not old and ugly and heavy!’

The Wind looked down at her. ‘Do you know you are growing across the path?’

‘What path?’ said Silvertoes saucily—but one doesn’t speak to the Wind like that, so she went on, ‘We-ell, it doesn’t go anywhere.’

‘Doesn’t it?’ said the Wind gravely. Then he added more kindly, ‘If I were you I’d grow the other way.’

‘I couldn’t see myself in the water,’ objected Silvertoes.

The Wind gave a gentle sigh and all her little, green leaves twinkled.

‘You might *just* be in time,’ he said. ‘You are a pretty young thing—but even I don’t care very much for witches’ brooms.’

And he went away.

One day there came a swineherd with all his pigs and *he* kicked Silvertoes hard. ‘Growing across the path you are. Move over now!’

‘I can’t see myself in the water if I do,’ said Silvertoes.

‘Handsome is as handsome does,’ said the swineherd and he kicked Silvertoes again, but he took off his cap to Timbertoes and all the pigs looked up from their acorns and grunted their thanks. When they went away, the swineherd tried to heave Silvertoes over a bit, but she wasn’t going to budge, so he stopped at last. ‘You are a pretty young thing,’ he admitted, ‘but I don’t like witches’ brooms.’

A few mornings later there came a wild pony, and the next morning a stag, and the next morning a fox and they all kicked or butted or scrabbled at Silvertoes, and they all said the same thing about witches' brooms. So Silvertoes complained to Timbertoes.

'You are still young enough to have just the time to grow your branches away from the path,' said Timbertoes. But Silvertoes shook with temper.

'You willy old tree!' she cried. 'I couldn't see myself in the water, and *I'm* quite sure the path leads nowhere. If anyone else says witches' broom to me I'll tell them about that ugly bush hidden in *your* branches.'

'They all know it's there,' said Timbertoes solemnly. 'It has been growing there for five hundred years.'

But Silvertoes didn't even listen; all she said was, 'Then it's high time you got rid of it.' And she went on admiring her leaves in the water.

One afternoon all the birds came and roosted in Timbertoes and were very polite to him, but Robin Redbreast and his wife Jenny Wren were sorry for Silvertoes and tried to help her.

'There's still just enough time to move over a little tiny bit,' they begged. 'Just off the path. You can do it, if you try.'

'I shan't try,' said Silvertoes. 'The path doesn't go *anywhere.'*

And the very next evening a band of holy men came along the path and Silvertoes was right across their way. They sent for a wood-cutter with a sharp axe and though Silvertoes shivered and sighed he cut her right down and made a big fire of her, saying, 'I don't like witches' brooms.'

By the light of its flames the holy men sang, and then they took a golden sickle and cut off the silver bough that Timbertoes guarded, and bore it away.

'Now I shall be lonely for another hundred years,' thought Timbertoes and he looked at the glowing red ashes. 'No witches ever dared bother me. She was a pretty young thing and very pleasant to look on.'

And he gave a sigh.

A Welsh Border tale Wem, near Whitchurch, told to me in 1909.

One of Mother's cousins, Miss Patty Jones, was told it as a little girl in 1840 by her grandmother, who was born in 1771. She always told it in precisely the same way, and so did Cousin Patty, although it had a very mid-Victorian 'literary' phraseology. However, I did meet with this in the early 1900s among older people.

Another tale written out for my convalescence by my mother in 1913.

NOTES In this tale, the mistletoe, described by James Fraser as ‘the golden bough’, is called the silver bough. The ancient Druidical practices at the religious cutting of the mistletoe from the sacred oaks would be well known to cultured people at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

See also ‘The Vixen and the Oakmen’, Pt One, No. 8.

15

The Wonderful Wood

Warwickshire

In old times there was a cruel king who liked to ride hunting young maidens, and after he caught them (and had his wicked way with them) he killed them with his sharp blade. All the fathers and mothers sent their daughters away to safety if they could, but there was one little maid in a lonely cottage who couldn’t go. Her granny was too poor to send her so she kept her hid and earned their bread by spinning. Now there was a wonderful wood near the cottage and nobody dare go into it, not even the wicked king, because of the great oak tree that grew there. One market day the granny was ill so the little maid she had to take along the hanks of wool or they’d starve.

She cried and her granny cried too and kissed her and blessed her and told her to go on her tip-toes all the way, and not to go through the wonderful wood though it was the quickest way. The little maid minded and off she went all on her tip-toes carrying the bundle of wool. She hadn’t got far when she caught sight of the cruel king riding along in the distance. She didn’t run or make any stir but all on her tip-toes she walked into the wonderful wood.

She walked the wood where the oaken tree stood
And she curtsied did she to the oaken tree
And he let her down to the town, the town
And Luck it went with her all up and down
From the wood, the wonderful wood.

So that was all right, wasn't it? But the cruel king had seen her go and that wasn't all right, was it? He spurred his horse and he took out his sharp blade and rode after her.

He rode through the wood where the oaken tree stood
And he curséd did he at the oaken tree
And he took his blade for to murder the maid
But a bough it fell quick and it brokéd his neck
In the wood, the wonderful wood.

So that was all right, wasn't it? But his men came looking for him. They could see him through the trees. The wicked crew were bent on revenge and they galloped into the wood to cut the oak tree down.

O they rode in the wood where the oaken tree stood
To cut down the tree, the oaken tree
Then the tree gave a groan and summoned his own
For the trees closed about and they never got out
Of the wood, the wonderful wood.

So that was all right, wasn't it?

A local folk-tale, sometimes called 'The Tale of the Tree that Stood all in the Wood', told by Miss Lily Kingston of Streetly, near Sutton Coldfield Park, 1916.

NOTES *Trees that move about:* this is still a West Country belief and, unless precautions are taken, to enter an unknown wood is fraught with danger. Trees are believed to be very revengeful and murderous at times. See B. Potter, *The Fairy Caravan.* See also 'Crooker', Pt Three, No. 20, 'The Elder Tree Witch', Pt One, No. 16, 'The Hare and the Harbourer', Pt Two, No. 21, and 'The Vixen and the Oakmen', Pt One, No. 8.

Other references: *Somerset Folk Lore,* Pt I, section 2, and J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* Pt 3, p. 59.

The folk air to this *conte-fable* was recovered in 1970.

Four

Witches and a Saint

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16

The Elder Tree Witch

Somerset (Severn Coast)

There were a farm not far from Knighton and ‘tis an unket bit of land round there but farmer took it and he did well. His few cows give the best milk round-abouts. There wadn’t any big trees to the farm but good hedges going down to the shores—and no elder bushes.

No one like elder thereabouts.

There was a tale my own great grandad used to tell and he’d aheard ‘en vrom his own girt grandad about a yeller as went to chop down a elder tree and it bled and chased ‘en—he might ha’ taken thought, witches can turn into elders if they wish but he didn’ and he got a terrible chasing till he crossed running water.

Well, whether farmer believed the tale or no, there come a time when his cows was being milked unbeknown to him.

He wasn't a rich man and he couldn't afford the loss so he gets up by starlight and goes out to make sure his cows was in safe grazing and there was the shadow of a tree up by the hedge.

So all in a cold sweat he drove cows to the little home-pasture but the chain was gone off the gate and he couldn't fasten it with iron, so he put a girt stone agin it.

Come morning he tells his womenfolk what had been seen and his wife she say, 'Thee girt fool, didn' 'ee draw a criss-cross in the mud droo the gate?'

No, he hadn'.

And his daughter she up and peep out the window then she turn so pale as curd cheese and run around cottering the inside shutters safely, crying, "Tis out on pasture now, right among the cows!'

'O Lord save us!' say the wife. 'What tree be it?'

'A elder!' say the girl shivering and shaking, and the old granny she lays the big iron shovel among the red-hot embers, and raked in a faggot of ash to make a blaze.

'Elder!' say the farmer and he were all a-shiver too but he were a courageous man and his cows was dear to him. 'Wife, go vetch thic zilver button as come off my Zunday coat.'

Well, she'd a sewed 'en on again, but she took and snipped 'en off and brought 'en to 'en and by time he'd a-load his gun with it the daughter she'd a-swung the cross-bar down across back-door and the granny she'd got the iron shovel nice and hot.

Then his wife opened vront-door a crack and he took a look. Thic there tree were right in among his cows now so he couldn' take a long shot.

'I'll have to get upsides with 'en,' he says. 'Hold the door open and let I out and in again if I has to run for it.'

And his wife she done it and out he went trembling all over. But he was bound to save his cows.

Well, the elder tree were right in among they and he had to get too close for comfort to take aim, and for the life of him he couldn' hold gun steady and the silver button missed her.

Well, she let out a yell and so did he, and she leapt arter 'en like a stag, and he leap too, and she come rushing arter him and he went rushing vor

thic open door. He were a fat old fellow but he made the pace and his wife she slammed door so quick she caught his coat tails in it, but for all that she drop the iron bar safe into its socket. And there they all was safe inside.

They could hear her branches a-scrattling and a-rattling outside and her a-skreeking like a high wind. Wife and daughter they skreeked too and farmer he bellered like a bull-calf trying to get his coat tails free and be out to his cows again.

He had the courage, *see*, but not the right knowledge, or not enough of it. Then they heard her rushing round the house and rap-tapping at the shutters but she couldn' get in, no more than they could get out—and what was to happen to the pig and the pony?

Then the old granny she get up vron hearth-place with the girt shovel of burning coals and she say to the girl, 'Open the back-door now, wide!' and she did and ran back to her mother, but the old granny she just stood there, and when the Elder Tree come straight at her and a-leaping and a-skreeking she just up and throw all they red-hot coals at her and come in and shut the back-door. Then they all see blue flames flicker and hear tree crackling into cinders.

After a bit Granny she take the ashen cattle gad and go out and there was a girt heap of ashes, cold already, and they women all made a crisscross on the ashes with the ashen gad, then they ran and opened shutters and vront-door again and varmer were able to free his coat tails and go out to his cows.

Then the neighbours all come and they all rejoiced, for they said that were the end of Madam Widecombe and her coach and the gold pig who pulled it. But 'twasn't to be—she were still around, the Combvvich man said, nor it wadn't the old black witch over to Steart and then someone up and told 'en Raggy Lyddy over to Dodington had valled in her vire and was burnded dead—so that were who 'twas.

An Edington widow, Mrs Pole, who was over eightyyears old, told me something of this tale which her father told her in her childhood. That would have been in about 1888, and since he had heard it from his great-grandfather in about 1830, the tale must go back to the early eighteenth century. The notion of the bleeding tree is, of course, much, much older.

NOTES The lore along the Severn coast has many Danish characteristics. In many northern counties the elder is regarded as a weird-woman.

According to Somerset folk-lore, elder will not be completely destroyed unless it is burned. Most hedgers and ditchers leave it to lie, or, rarely, tie the other branches into faggots to make a feed for an ailing beast, since it is a wonderfully curative plant.

Cottered is a northern word meaning to close and bar with metal.

Ashen cattle gad is an ox-goad made of protective ash-wood. Ash or hazel, being magical trees, were used by drovers and ploughmen.

17

The Three Pigs

Dorset (Wiltshire Border)

Charley Chibbet had a pig and he reckoned come Revel Time he'd take the prize.

He'd a-got a tub of blue paint to smarten up the palings and cottage door for Revel but he left 'en be till Sarah she covered the tub with a old copper lid and he come on down to the Royal Oak night arter night to tell about his pig.

Then, the very evening avore Revel young Jacky got overfull of zider and open his zilly mouth, 'Yew bin talking on and on 'bout your pig but there's some of us been laying down silver on the outcome. 'Ave 'ee bin and took a look at Tucker's pig?' Well, they men looked all ways at the yule, and Charley he finished his pint careful and then he 'd'say 'Tucker? Can't call no Tucker to mind 'n the village.'

'Lives down Church Cottages. He'm a voreigner. He only bin working vor Parson twelve year.'

Well, Old Charley up and go out, and they lets into young Jacky Ash vor not keeping his mouth buttoned.

When Sarah see him come whoame avore closing-time she had feeling summat was properly wrong. 'Come whoame to paint vence for tomorrow I don't spose,' say she, 'so folks can run up against it all wet, and ruinate their clothes like that Tucker done his ash-stick. I come out of door to vind 'en droo our gate without asking leave, and poking your tub of paint with his ash-plant. "What's got yur?" he say nasty like. "Pig swill?"'

‘I’ll give ‘ee pig swill, poking uninvited, and you a stranger to these parts,’ I tells ‘en. ‘Take theyself and stick outzide gate, where ‘ee belong.’ And I take broom to ‘en to bustley his veet a bit and his stick come out of tub bright blue. He wadn’t best pleased.’

But all Old Charley say to all that were, ‘Come on Sarah, we’m goin’ to take a walk to look at Tucker’s pig.’

Well, they went down to Church Cottages, and Tucker he sneaked himself and his blue stick into back-place, but Mrs Tucker she brazened things out. ‘Ave ‘ee come to see Tucker?’ she calls out.

‘No, nor his pig swill,’ say Sarah. ‘But, oh my dear soul, be that your pig?’

It were indeed, so large and vat and clean as a daisy and it zmelled like a angel in heaven.

‘Baby powder,’ zay Mrs Tucker careless-like, ‘what I had left vrom Lucy’s twins, and he’s a whole tablet of perfume soap for tomorrow. How be yours a-doing?’

‘Oh,’ say Sarah quick as quick, ‘he’m all bedded down in lavender, as is usually done in these parts. ‘Tis hard on our bushes but ‘tis the proper usage—but strangers to parish ‘oodn’t know.’

Then they went back to whoame, and all Old Charley says was, ‘Baby powder!’

And Sarah says prompt, ‘I throwed the tin away twenty year ago.’

And then Old Charley he say, ‘We’ve agot no lavender bush,’ and Sarah she answer, ‘Can go borrow cossn’t us?’ And she ups and off ‘cause she see all too plain Old Charley’s heart were abrokt.

He went and scrubbed pig again and dried ‘en every inch with Sarah’s best tablecloth and when she come back with a girt armvul of Rector’s lavender she never say a word to ‘en. She could see his mind was a-working, and she were a-scared vor ‘n. His old aunty were a ‘gifted’ creature, and she’d never got away from the feeling in forty years of wedded life that her man were capable of ‘strange dealings’. They bedded pig down in Rector’s lavender and went to bed theirselves but the minute Sarah began to snore, Old Charley he was up and dressed and outside again.

‘Twas just on midnight but he were downright desperate. He took a long hazel twig from faggot and off he goes vor Tucker’s, and there he scratch a circle-round, and stand twig in middle but vor his dear life he couldn’t

bring himself to say they words of ill-wishing—he were a good old man were Charley, but drove desperate. And then as church clock begun to strike twelve, twig began to twirly-whirly inzide ring all by its lone zelf. Charley he turned and pelt for whoame as if the Old Boy were on his tail. And so he med ha' bin, vor he only missed the paint-tub by a hand's breadth and sent the lid clit-clatter vor the world to hear, and he didn' feel secure until he'd got Sarah and the blankets atween him and his deed.

Come morning the neighbours come a-running and then Sarah come a-shouting but Old Charley he daresn't move. Then they all yelled together, 'Charley, your pig's blue!' That fetched 'n. And, sure enough, blue that pig were—every inch on 'im. 'Valled in the paint he have,' mourned Sarah, 'and it was Tucker tipped the lid last night. Yew mark my words, his ash-plant's blue too.'

Well, some said one thing and some said another, but Tucker didn' win no prize, in spite of baby powder folk didn' like his blue stick, and Old Charley he didn' win neither, folks didn' like his blue pig. In the end they gave it to a liddle black baconer of Rector's housekeeper. He wadn' much of a pig yet, but the poor old soul was in such a terrible taking about the way her lavender bushes had been a-broke that they had to cheer her up somehow.

I have heard versions of this from Corfe Mullen, Dorset, 1932, from farm children at Tatworth, about 1906, from a farmer, Cricket St Thomas, Somerset, about 1908, and from Crowcombe W.I., 1929.

NOTES The tale is a well-known West Country warning against meddling with magic.
'So blue as Charley's pig' is a West Country saying.
The hazel tree is believed to have magic properties.

18

Jakey Bascombe and the Cob

Gloucestershire

My mother always drove our cob. She took him to market regularly and he'd go well. He was very fast and everybody knew him, but he was so smart and good to handle she could do anything with him.

And all of a sudden he turned. He would become nappy and back away or just stand for an hour for no reason. In the end he had the dog-cart over and broke the shafts and Mother's arm was put in plaster. They were going to have the vet and get him put down. Father thought he had Poll Evil. It was hay-carrying time and the vet was too busy to come.

Grandma (she lived six miles away) was ailing and she wanted to see Mother. All the horses were working except the cob, and of course, Mother couldn't drive him. We had a very old man still doing little jobs on the farm. Father wouldn't part with him—he'd worked for us sixty-five years, and he said to Mother, 'I'll drive cob vor 'ee, missus. There's old putt I can put 'en in and 'tis heavy enough to steady 'en up.'

Well, Mother chanced it. Father never knew till after—he'd have been furious and old Ben drove to Grandma's without a bit of trouble.

Grandma was better, so they didn't stay too long; they wanted to get back while the cob was in the right mood, so Mother was cross when old Ben went a roundabout way all through the lanes. 'I knows what I be about, missus,' was all he said and they came home at a fine, smart trot all the way.

When Mother did tell Father, he had a word with old Ben, then he phoned the vet not to come. Mother didn't want the cob put down, so of course she asked why. And Father said, 'Did you notice which way old Ben came back?'

Mother said, 'Yes, almost in a circle.'

Father said, 'Going westerly?'

'Yes, it must have been.'

'Well then,' said Father, 'Ben tells me the cob has been driven along the lower road lately that goes past Jakey Bascombe's and it goes wrong-handed. Ben says he reckons Jakey Bascombe won't overlook the cob any more and his ill-wish will go back on him.'

The cob worked for Mother for years afterwards and never misbehaved but Jakey was tipped out of his putt and kicked, and laid up for a month, seven days after old Ben brought Mother home 'with the sun'.

From afarmer's daughter who lived in the Mendip Hills above Bristol, and who was a member of Brislington W.I., 1962.

NOTES To go 'wrong-handed' or 'against the sun' (widdershins') is regarded as being unlucky.

It is said that Old Ben also wore a scarlet pimpernel in his hat, and that 'the Missus' knew she must not mention it at all. Long after, she did, and everyone understood and approved her previous silence.

19

The Little Wee Tyke

Northumberland (Scots Border)

There was a little wee tyke and he was black, so nobody wanted him.

He wasn't so big as the house-cat, so nobody wanted him for a house-dog either.

They said he was no use at all and they were going to drown him when a poor, ragged little lassie begged for him and got him.

She ran home with him. 'Mammy! I've brought a little wee tyke!' she cried.

'There's no water for the porridge,' said her mother. 'The well's bewitched. He'll die of thirst like us all.'

Not if I'm about,' said the little wee tyke. 'Let me alone to deal with this.'

Then the farmer came in.

'I can't get out to my sheep,' he said. 'The gate's bewitched and the ewes and lambs need watching against hill foxes.'

'Not if I'm about,' said the little wee tyke. 'Leave me alone to deal with them.'

Then the son came in.

'The cow's bewitched. There's not a drop of milk to sell.'

Then his little came in.

'The hens are bewitched. There's no eggs and they'lI never cackle or walk about any more.'

‘Not if I’m about,’ said the little wee tyke. ‘Let me alone to deal with this.’

‘You!’ they all cried out angrily, ‘Get out!’ They started to throw things at him. The little lassie picked him up. ‘You!’ said the little lassie. ‘Could you? Would you?’

‘I would and what’s more I will,’ said the little wee tyke and out the door he went.

‘He can’t get out any more than we can,’ said the farmer. But he had.

‘You can’t pass through,’ said the gate. ‘Old Witch Nanny laid it on me to keep back all who belong here.’

‘I don’t belong here *yet*,’ said the little wee tyke and he went through to the sheep. After he rounded them up so nicely and quietly into the fold by the wall he went back to the hen-house and carried the twelve hens safe inside. ‘I don’t belong here *yet* so I’ll break the mischief on you. When I’ve fetched your water, you can each lay an egg for me.’

Then he went down to the well and the family were all watching by now. He scratched all round where the spring ran out. ‘Old Witch Nanny laid it on me not to run freely for any who belong here,’ said the well. ‘I don’t belong here *yet,’* said the little wee tyke and he kicked away the witchstone and the water ran all down by the door and the mother got a pailful for the porridge.

Then the farmer went out to the fold and the little boy ran and found twelve eggs, and the cow was milked.

‘You all said we needed a dog,’ said the little lassie.

‘I’ve not done yet,’ said the little wee tyke.

But they all came running back and crying, ‘The witch is on her way here!’ and ran to bolt the door, but the little wee tyke said, ‘Let me out first. I’ll deal with her,’ and they shut him out and the little lassie cried.

Old Witch Nanny walked widdershins all round the farm. ‘That’ll hold them fast,’ she cackled.

‘Oh no, it won’t. Not a bit,’ barked the little wee tyke, ‘because I’ve come behind you backwards and scratched your footprints all out.’

Old Witch Nanny turned around in terror and dropped her broom. ‘That’s clever, that is,’ said the little wee tyke, and stood *across* [cross-wise] it and then all she dare do was shriek ‘Scat!’ at him,

‘I’m not a house-cat,’ said the little wee tyke. ‘I can use my teeth as well as bark.’

Then Old Nanny the witch tried to climb up the thatch-roof but the little wee tyke took a good bite of her left leg and hung on as she climbed. When he let go and rolled down to the ground she sat on the roof bleeding and yelling and could never do any mischief any more. Then she fell off the roof and lay in the farmyard. ‘I’m dying!’ she whimpered.

‘Not just yet,’ said the little wee tyke. ‘Old Nick has got to fetch you and we don’t want him here—and he don’t like the look of me and my teeth. Take yourself away and die Somewhere Else before he takes you there!’

And away she hobbled and crawled right out of sight. And there was thunder and lightning and a great green flame.

Then the little lassie called the little wee to come in.

‘I don’t said the little wee

‘We all want you,’ said the little boy.

‘But I’m black,’ said the little wee tyke.

‘So is our house-cat,’ said the mother, ‘and she is almost good and clever as you.’

‘I’m too small,’ said the little wee tyke.

‘You got good teeth,’ said the father.

‘You won’t chase me with the poker or throw things at me, or tread on me when I’m sleeping?’

‘Never!’ they cried, and the little lassie brought him a bowl of milk.

And when he had lapped it all up he came in. ‘This is about my size,’ he said, and went to sleep in one of the farmer’s slippers.

Told by a visiting minister from the Carlisle area, 1912.

NOTES *Tyke* is the north-country word for a dog.

It is said that to draw a witch’s blood deprives her of all evil power. See ‘Black Annis’, Pt Two, No. 4.

20

Counting the Cabbages

Bedfordshire

There was a countryman who had green fingers—bright green they was and there was nothing to be done about it and he did grow the best cabbages in the county. His beans was fine, his apples was grand, but his cabbages were a marvel. Rows and rows of ‘um, round as the baby’s head, so who’d worry about green fingers. He never minded but *his wife knew better*! She told everyone so and she took the yard broom to him and scrubbed them so sore he couldn’t do his planting for a bit and the cabbages were half-size, but even then they were larger than anyone else’s. No doubt there was some would have liked him to lose his luck but he was a steady, careful chap. His wife was easier to handle.

It was coming on to the fall of the year and he’d got in his beans and dug up the taters and clamped the roots all ready for the hard winter that his fingers warned him were on its way. *But his wife knew better.* She left the apple-tree loaded till they begun to frost-fall and was only half-sound to cut into apple rings and then to be sure she was in a great hurry and blamed *him.*

So out he goes a bit put-out like to count the greenstuff he’d been careful to grow to see the long winter through.

The herbs was hanging on the fences bunched up and drying, so he starts to count the cabbages.

‘I shouldn’t do that,’ says St Peter leaning over the gate so friendly as a neighbour. ‘Leave them be and cut a criss-cross on each stalk you chop and you’ll do.’

‘I thought you was a fisherman,’ say Green Fingers.

‘I had a bit of ground by the lake when I wasn’t after fish. Grew things a marvel. Dead fish was what that ground liked and it wasn’t too bad living up wind as we did.’

Then Green Fingers knew he was talking to a real gardener and stood up to go to the gate but St Peter had gone on. ‘I’d like his opinion on dead eels,’ he said, so he calls his wife to say she can cut *one* cabbage for supper and put a *criss-cross* on the stem and off he went to ask St Peter.

Well, *his wife knew better.* Of course she did.

She cut the whole lot down and never made a criss-cross and then she piled them all in the shed where the cows was kept and felt quite proud of herself.

St Peter said eels might do, but cow-muck was handier and might be better than Galilee goats. So he went into the cowshed to get a fork load

and saw what was left of the cabbages. There was twenty hungry cows relished them.

Then he goes indoors looking a bit grim.

‘I see how you handled our cabbages for the winter,’ he said.

‘Oh yes, I knew better than that,’ she said. ‘I likes my cabbages handy.’

‘So did the cows,’ says Green Fingers. ‘I’ll get along with herbs and beans but I reckon it’ll be rotten apples and potatoes and point for you by next Easter. I’ve filled the salt-box and you must make it last till then.’

When Easter came he was well and hearty and working in the plot when his neighbour looked in. ‘Who’ve you got visiting?’ he asked. ‘That skinny old creature! That’s my wife,’ says Green Fingers. ‘She’s just showing she knows better.’

From a soldier on leave, 1940s.

NOTES *Potatoes and point* is famine fare, i.e., baked potatoes dipped in salt and pointed where the meat should be.

For other references to ‘cabbage charm’ see Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore* (1877).

Five

Ghosts and Evil Spirits

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22 The Claverton Books
23 The Hob who was a Watchman
24 Herne's Horn
25 The Noontide Ghost

21

The Collingbourne Kingston Black Dog

Wiltshire

There was a pair of robbers who were the terror of the countryside. They robbed on the Bath highway, rich and poor alike, three pennies or three guineas was all the same to them—they took it. But when it came to setting thatch afire to rob a farm near Marlborough to hide murder, the men of the Wiltshire Downs got together to catch and send them to Devizes Jail to be hanged next Sessions.

All the countryside had liked the old farmer and his wife, and neighbours often dropped by to give a hand or bring a pie or a batch of new-baked loaves, for the old wife was not as strong as she had been. One morning someone was coming by with some cream when he saw the thatch ablaze and roused the village with the horn—but when they dragged out

the old couple they found they had been killed with an iron bar. The hue and cry was up for miles and the murderers dodged here and there hiding by day and going on by night until they had to cross the Downs from Everley to Collingbourne Kingston. There were woods down there that would give them cover and time to rest, for the pursuit was coming up with them—but they forgot nobody ever went that way after dark if they could help it—especially those with evil consciences. Well, in their fear of pursuers behind them they forgot the worse fear before them until they were among the trees.

Now they were safe awhile.

But were they?

And then they remembered the Black Dog with his huge, gleaming green eyes like saucers. He brought ill-luck to all who met him and death to the evil-doer. And these two had cruel murder on their minds.

As they hesitated they heard distant shouting and ran deeper into the dark wood, but as they paused for breath there was a light—a green light from the Black Dog's eyes—and they screamed and stumbled away down another path.

When again they stopped, all was quiet and dark, until a green light from ghostly eyes shone just by their shoulders.

They turned, screaming, and ran all the way back up on to the Downs, where the hue and vry were waiting for them.

They were put into hand-cuffs and taken in triumph to Devizes Jail.

'We knew we'd get them when they ran down into the woods. All we had to do was wait outside and let the Black Dog send 'em back,' the villagers said.

The robbers were hanged in the eighteenth century but the Black Dog has still been seen in the twentieth century.

So you need a clear conscience to travel the road to Collingbourne Kingston after dark.

Told by C. *Potter, Collingbourne Kingston, Wiltshire, 1920s.*

NOTES Here are some other references to the West Country Black Dog: 'When I was fourteen I was coming home alone one dark night when a big, dark dog ran up beside me and jumped up. I remembered the tales my father had told me, and I just couldn't move with terror. I was cold with sweat and my tongue couldn't make a sound. Then I heard someone call me, and some of my

pals came along—the dog belonged to one of them. When I got home my mother took one look at me and said "What have you been up to?"'

C. Potter, Collingbourne Kingston, 1921

Another Black Dog was seen in a lane near Kingston St Mary (Somerset) by a farmer in the 1930s:
'There was a man we knew who told us that when he was coming along one of the lanes near Kingston at night a huge dog jumped out of the hedgeside at him and he couldn't get by—so he gave it a push and then he found he couldn't move, and after a while it went away through a narrow little gate, and it was as big as a calf but it slipped right through. He never went that way again.'

Mrs Hill, Crowcombe, 14 March 1967

On being asked what colour the dog was, and whether it was black, Mrs Hill's answer was, 'Yes, they're usually black.'

Sounding the horn for the hue and cry was a primitive method of raising the alarm in scattered communities, used till the nineteenth century. The *hue and cry* is not often heard nowadays. This called on everyone to assist in the capture of evil-doers. I think it was used in the Welsh farm double murder case near Pembroke in the 1950s. It was the rousing of a countryside to find the criminals, as happened on Dartmoor in December 1966, although I do not think modern reporters called it by its ancient name.

Here is a reference to it:

'When I was a boy, in 1918, I was called on to help for a child murder case. Burbage Turnpike is three miles from Collingbourne Kingston where the Avon Canal begins its run through Devizes and Hungerford to London. There was a deep well there and that's where they found the baby's body.'

C. Potter, Collingbourne Kingston, 29 April 1967

22

The Claverton Books

Somerset (Wiltshire Border)

Would you like to hear a true story that happened to me?

It's many years ago now—I am seventy-five—when I was thirteen I went to stay with some relatives not far from Bath. They were living at the School House at Claverton and it was haunted. They did not tell me this and when I went up to my bedroom the first night, I slept very well. The

second night I heard heavy boots coming up the stairs and the door was opened. It was moonlight but I could not see anything. The dog was lying by the bed and he shivered all over and his hair rose. Then he howled and I screamed and my uncle and aunt come running up, and they said, 'We didn't want to tell you but your aunt [another sister] last month saw a man standing out there under the trees and when she went to ask him what he was doing there, he disappeared. Her sister, another moonlight night, heard someone walking across the school yard in heavy boots. She was never afraid of anything so she ran out to catch him and she saw a man in dark clothes cross the yard and go to the door. But when she caught up with him he disappeared. Well, we were all very upset and then she said, "We've got an unquiet spirit here. I'll go and get someone who knows how to deal with such." And she went and brought back an old man who was "gifted".'

'The first thing he said was, "You have an unquiet spirit here. It wants something from that upstairs room. What is there that belonged to the people who lived here before?" The man who lived there long before was a schoolmaster and he committed suicide and no one knew why. He had been greatly respected and the children loved him and everyone was very upset about it so my aunt went upstairs to the room and she brought down a pile of school records that had once been his. And when they began to look through them they found he had been using the school money and the time was coming when the books would be inspected and he could not put the money back. Then the old man said to me, "Make a pile of the books in the middle of the yard and we'll have a bonfire," and he lit it. "Now the unhappy spirit will find its rest. We're all Christian souls, we won't talk."'

This tale of a dog and a ghost, originating in about 1905, was told to me at Portishead W.I. on 14 February 1967.

NOTES The spirit was earth-bound because of its undiscovered crimes.

23

The Hob who was a Watchman

Somerset (Sedgemoor)

When my brother and his wife went on a holiday abroad I said I would stay in their house and look after the dog. It's a very old house—doors creak and windows rattle—but I did not mind as long as I had the dog with me. One night, about two o'clock, I was suddenly wakened by hearing footsteps and the dog jumped on to my bed, got between me and the wall and shivered, my hair rose on end but I did manage to switch on the bed-lamp. The poor dog shivered up against me and began first to whimper and then to howl and then the door creaked and slowly opened.

It opened quite wide too.

I could not see anything but the dog could. He is a big fellow, a labrador, and he got right under the eiderdown.

I just sat there. I could not move or do anything. And all of a sudden it was all over.

When I told my sister on her return she said, 'Oh yes, but he's quite friendly. I think he must have been the night-watchman for the family. When I hear the footsteps, and I often do, I just call out "Hallo there, I'm quite all right, thank you" and he goes away.'

I'm afraid I did not do that. I always took two aspirins at night, till they came home.

This second tale of a dog and a ghost comes from Othery W.I., and was told on 6 *March 1967. The events of the story are said to have taken place at an old manor house near North Petherton.*

NOTES The spirit is probably the 'hob' of the ancient house, still taking care of its occupants.

Labradors are notoriously susceptible to the uncanny.

24

Herne's Horn

Berkshire

Three silly young chaps were out for mischief. One of them was a teddy-boy come for the day and the other two were from Windsor—so they went in the forest and began breaking down the young trees.

Then the teddy-boy gave a shout: ‘Coo! look what I found. Who’s been filming Robin Hood now?’ The Windsor chaps didn’t answer and looked a bit queer at him—then he began to feel a bit off himself; no film could have been shot among those bushes.

‘Leave it lay,’ said one of the Windsor lads and run like hell! ‘Don’t touch it!’ shouts the other and took off too.

Well, being a teddy-boy he had to show off and blow it. The horn gave such a groan and a blast he nearly fainted and as he stood shaking there was a terrible yell among the trees and great hounds baying. He took off too but he couldn’t catch up with the Windsor lads who were going hell for leather to church—and run as he might he kept stumbling and shivering and listening to the feet behind him.

The Windsor lads safe inside the church-door saw him staggering on and heard the dogs baying. He was nearly to the door when the pursuer stopped; they heard the twang of an arrow and the teddy-boy threw up his arms and screamed and fell flat on his face in the porch, quite dead.

There was no arrow through him, and there were no hounds and no hunter.

Told in 1964 at Cecil Sharp House by a Berkshire Morris member of the E.F.D.S.S.

NOTES The interest in this tale is the modernizing of a very old folk theme.

25

The Noontide Ghost

Somerset (Exmoor)

’Tis a old ancient tale they do tell about farm [i.e. the storyteller’s farm].

There were a queer old chap kept a-hanging round village. Folk did see ’en to owl-light and night-time, some did zay he shined like a spunky —as you d’ call a Jacky-my-Lanthorn—but some yolks ‘11 tell ‘ee anything. He come in noontime too but all was afraid to speak to ‘en for all his clothes was of a strange fashion.

Then one noon he come to view outside our varm door and the granny couldn’t abear his sorrow, she ups and speaks to ‘en as priest d’ say she should. ‘In the name of the Lord why troublest thou me?’ she say and a-called out, ‘Yew poor unhappy soul, come tell I.’

And the old grey ghost he zay, ‘Where be my mill then? And my son’s cottage by the oak coppices? There be a gurt stone mill by river and no cottage and only one gurt aged old oak.’ Then the granny she see the rights of it. ‘Be church still there?’

‘They’ve a-got a new stone one since I went to market s’morning, and I did promise Bet I ‘oodn’t stay late. Where be my dear old wife?’

The granny she see how ’twas but she kept her peace and only say, ‘*Who* did ’ee meet on the road?’

‘A queer sort of chap and we got to wagering games and old merriment, and he d’want me to stay longer, but I gainsayed ’en, Bet ’ood be a-waiting. Where be my dear wife?’

And then, they ’d’say, there were a light, and a wind that smelled sweet as a primrose bank and a voice like a throstle in song said, ‘Come whoame now, my dear, yew don’t belong down there no more. Come on whoame.’ And the sad old ghost he give a beautivul smile and he went clean away.

From a very old farmer in the Horner, Luccombe, and Porlock area, 1929. The tale was taken down as the old man spoke and sent on to me by friends. He must have been a recognized teller of folk-tales and possibly a singer too. The farm might have been near Porlock or Luccombe.

Miss Acland told me that the Exmoor forest demon would be from Dunkery, where, in 1902, the Horner churchgoers would not go to evensong in the winter at Luccombe because he waited for them at Dunkery foot by the ruined chapel as a stag or a ram. The Rev. Acland therefore used to hold the service in the afternoon.

NOTES This is one of the many Rip-Van-Winkle tales where the returned victim has stepped ‘out of time’. In Somerset, it would be said that he ‘stepped over the edge’.

Six

Rhozzums and a Liddlin

26a The Long Ladder
b The Men in the Turnip Field (a liddlin)
27 No One Living
28 The Sign
29 Grandad's Dog
30 Two Waff Tales

26a

The Long Ladder

Herefordshire

My brother's boy Tom have gone to work foreign in Hereford to learn to be a carpenteer. Well one time Tom and Carpenteer was mending church spire and they had a tremendous long ladder. Carpenteer he forgot a tool and went all down and back to village. When he come back he calls up to Tom from churchyard. 'Hey, Tom, don't 'e go to climb all down the long ladder.'

'Oh,' say Tom, 'I be halfways down it already.'

'Oh!' say Carpenteer. 'Well I've took he away.'

From a Hereford farmer, the brother of a Bradford-on-Tone W.I. member, 1964.

26b

The Men in the Turnip Field (a liddlin)

Somerset (Taunton Vale)

There was two fellows out working in a field, hoeing turnips they was, and the one he stop and he lean on his hoe, and he mop his vace and he say, 'Yur—I don't believe in these yur ghosteses!'

And t'other man he say, 'Don't 'ee?'

And he VANISHED!

From Taunton School, 1904. Told by my brothers Clifford and Eric Tongue.

27

No One Living

Somerset

The old sexton was a very crabbed old man and when he was about his business he hated to be interrogated. On one occasion, however, he was digging a grave close by the path across the churchyard which is used often as a short cut and a right of way. Very soon curious villagers found occasion to pass by.

'Someone dead then?'

'Who be that for

'Now who be dead now

One persistent questioner, receiving no answer, stepped to the very edge of the grave and shouted the question as if for the deaf. 'Who be dead then?' The old man stopped digging, leaned on his spade and looked at the inquisitive villagers severely. Then he said in decisive tones, 'No one living hereabouts.'

Told by W. Brewer, a taxi proprietor of Stogumber, 1965.

28

The Sign

Cambridgeshire

There were four young scamps of undergraduates who ran off with an inn signboard for a ‘rag’. Well, of course, the proctor and his bulldogs were on their tails within minutes, and came to the college and up to the leader’s rooms.

His oak was sported [the door was shut], so they knocked and a very serious young man with a prayer book in his hand opened for them and returned to a reverent group.

The room was very warm with a fine, blazing fire and beside it sat the others listening with rapt faces and open testaments to the preaching of their leader.

As the door opened he gave out his text: ‘Ye shall seek for a sign but it shall not be vouchsafed unto you.’

Afavourite nineteenth-century tale of my grandfather, the Rev. Joseph Tongue of Yarmouth. Told between 1870 and 1907.

29

Grandad’s Dog

Buckinghamshire

There was a fellow by name of Chandler had a dog and he was always on about its clever ways, and running down other chaps’ dogs and forever riddling them that they’d make a bad mistake or say black was white and then he’d win a wager of a bob.

A bob in those times paid for a round of beer and there were plenty grudged the silver going into one man’s pocket on account of his dog. He

could talk of nothin' else, and twist any one, that chap Chandler would, and he come to be very unpopular with the whole pub, landlord as well—for he never bought a round or a single pint out of his wagering, so the pub's trade was down every week and the company was a very thirsty one and hadn't the cash to go elsewhere. There were some had come to the pub for years and meant to stay, but a bob out of a man's beer-money meant he couldn't turn up regular, so at last Old Bob up and very slowly said, 'My grandad had a dog.'

Well, Chandler he were busy rooking a newcomer and he only heard the word 'dog'. He turned on Old Bob in a flash. 'Big 'un?' The fellow could fire questions like a gun.

'I reckon so,' says Old Bob quietly.

'Long coat?'

'Couldn't say.' (Old Bob's grandad died seventy year back.)

'Big ears?'

'Not exactly,' says Old Bob, thinking it out.

'He won't be no use for rabbiting—no use below ground.'

'He goed pretty deep,' says Old Bob gravely while the company hid their grins.

'What d'ye feed 'en on?'

'He don't need much,' Old Bob shook his white head.

'Don't sound a good dog to my way of thinking. How lean is he?'

'Haven't dug him up to look, since we buried him fifty year back. And now I'll have your shilling, Chandler—stand the rest of the company a round, landlord!'

From a farm-labourer, Chalfont St Giles, 1930s.

30

Two Waff Tales

Yorkshire (North Riding)

(a) The Stone Brig

[NOTE A waif is a wraith or doppelganger—a spectral double of a doomed man sent as a death warning.] There wor a waif an’ he wor in a proper todo. He’d forgot wheer he was bound for and the why, then he hears summat howlin’ and groaning familiar like, and ’tis another waif i’the same pickle.

‘Theer’s the two on us, then,’ says Number One, and they both took heart at that and went along a bit cheered up.

Well, they coom t’stoan brig over a fast river, with a force [waterfall] not far beyond it, roaring. Hungry aftha some’uns life that river wor, and all ready waiting. They leans over stone wall of brig and looks down, and there’s two chaps in an owd boat they couldn’t manage coom a-swirling down. ‘Looks like they’ll be drownded if they don’t tak’ to oars,’ says Number Two. T’chaps look up white-faced, and sights the two waifs looking down like. Ee! That fetches un! Took to their oars like mad, gets reet to bank, and lights out for the woods at a bust and was gone.

‘Ee!’ says Number One. ‘Didsta’ tak’ note of the red-haired chap? The living spit of thee he wor.’

‘Aye,’ says Number Two, ‘an’ t’ ill un as like thee as two pins.’

‘Ah doan’t relish the thawt of it,’ says Number One. ‘’Tis reckoned unlucky to meet up face to face, and they was headed up here for t’brig as they run.’

‘I’m not the lad for an unchancy meeting,’ says Number Two. ‘Coom on, we’ll stir our sens!’

And both waifs went clean out like candle flames. *Just like that!*

From a Yorkshire correspondent, 1960s.

NOTE This thick-headed pair sound like ‘dobbies’ (slow-witted brownies).

Yorkshire (Scots Border)

(b) The Return

Theer wor a near owd fella as come reglar t’shoap for t’coppersw’uth, an’ yan da he dropped deid sudden, reet i’ tha shoap.

That wor a bit of a bad do, but ’twor wuss aftha. Foak in shoap gett’n seat of his waif hoverin’ by t’counter and traade fell to nowt. ’T’wor

Passon’s job, so t’send for ’un.

Waif walk in, and Passon given ’un a challenge like.

‘Na, na, Passon,’ says t’ghaist, ‘A’m no for stayin’, down heer, but A’m no gangin’ awa’ to t’Good Place till I’se getten ma bawbee change!’

From a correspondent, 1936.

Part Two

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2 The Long, Long Worm	*Bedfordshire*
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4 Black Annis	*Leicestershire*
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Two *The People of the Hills*

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Three *Legends and Folk-tales*

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Five *Ghosts and Evil Spirits*

21 The Hare and the Harbourer (two versions) — *Welsh Border / Hampshire*

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One

Giants and Monsters

1 In My Pocket
2 The Long, Long Worm
3 The Sea Terror
4 Black Annis
5 The Shuck

1

In My Pocket

Lincolnshire

There was a giant and a dwarf and they went about together. The giant was big and stupid and the dwarf he was little and good and clever, so they got along quite well for a time.

One day they were hungry and they saw some sheep. ‘I could eat a little mutton,’ said the good little dwarf. ‘I could eat a lot of mutton,’ said the giant. ‘But we must pay for it with work,’ said the good little dwarf, ‘as we have no money. And we’ll only take a little

So he called all his brothers out of the hill. They were hungry too and they took the little sheep, but when they had killed it they found the giant had killed two fine fat rams. So the brothers ran back to the hill and the good little dwarf jumped into the giant’s pocket and hid there and the wizard came up and the giant was too stupid to run.

‘Who has killed my ram with golden horns?’

‘Not me,’ said the good little dwarf in the pocket in a big voice like the giant’s.

‘And who has killed my ram with silver horns?’

‘Not me,’ said the good little dwarf in the pocket in the big voice.

‘And who has killed my white curly-coat lamb?’

‘Not me,’ squeaked the stupid giant for the good little dwarf gave him a pinch.

So the wizard couldn’t do anything about that because they were telling the truth. So he says, ‘We’ll ask riddles, and if I guess yours you’ll have to serve me one hundred years and if I’m wrong and you guess mine you may have the sheep.’

And the giant agreed because the good little dwarf bid him.

So the wizard says:

‘Cold feet, cold head,
Brown, dry, not dead—What’s that?’

The stupid giant just scratched his head, but the good little dwarf calls out in the big voice, ‘A winter tree, master.’

And that was right.

‘You may have the sheep,’ says the wizard, ‘but I’ll win you for a hundred years. Let’s hear your riddle.’

The giant listened to the good little dwarf and said very slowly:

‘Two for one’ (and that was the giant),
‘A small one for the rest’ (and that was the brothers),
‘And a little, little piece for my pocket’ (and that was the good little dwarf).

The wizard couldn’t guess that so he went away, but when the good little dwarf and his brothers looked for the white curly-coat lamb, the giant had ate him too. So all the dwarfs left him, and by and by the wizard came by and the giant was still eating but this time it was an ox.

‘Who killed my fine black ox?’

‘Not me,’ said the stupid giant remembering what he had said before. But it wasn’t true this time, so the wizard made him work for a hundred

years.

‘Grandmother’ Carr told this tale in our farm kitchen at Blyton Carr in the 1870s.

NOTES According to Aunt Annie Tongue, ‘Great Grandmother sometimes said “wizard” and sometimes “magician”.’

It is likely that this Norse tale did not come from a chapbook, but existed as oral tradition only. Perhaps Professor Tolkien came across a variant (see **J.** R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*). It might be traceable.

An addition to the tale, made by my great-aunt, Miss Hetty Carr, of Blyton Carr Farm, runs as follows:

The Giant’s Punishment

They say he [the giant] had to dig up some of the hills in Yorkshire and drop them in Lincolnshire all along the River Trent here to keep out the floods at Gainsborough.

This is a nature myth which is also attributed to ‘Old Scrat’.

2

The Long, Long Worm

Bedfordshire

She said there was a tremendously long worm that stretched from the lane we were in to some woods a mile off. It was a dragon but it had no wings and crawled like a serpent and it could breathe fire. It emptied the country and was hungry, so it grew cunning and buried itself all except the tip of its tail and its head. The head was in the wood and the tip of its tail just stuck out a little a mile off.

‘It was a long, long worm and you could see the mark of where it lay in my daddy’s time and it come close to this lane here. But it was all ploughed later when they found the gold, whole heaps of it like the treasure of Maple Durham, that was lying all along—it was the dragon’s bed, but no one know.’

She went on to say the lane was an ancient trackway used by travellers to the distant local fair and that no one had used it for a long while. One

day a great flock of geese came down the greenway, gobbling all the grass and one of them saw the tip of the tail.

'"Here's a fine worm," she says and she tugs, and she tugs, and she tugs. "Oh dordi! It was a long, long worm." Then all the other geese they gets hold and tugs and tugs and tugs. "Oh my soul! That was a long, long worm!" Then the goose-herds they took hold and they tugs and tugs and tugs. "Oh my dear God! That was a long, long worm surely!" Then it breaks out of its bed of gold and it swings its head all the long, long way round and it eats the lot and goes to sleep where it was. So the Hearnes killed it and found the gold and all their women have gold teeth ever since then, and every Hearne you meet is a beggar and a liar and they'll say anything for a copper or two. Us Samsons we scorns anything that isn't silver.'

'Heaven bless you, my gentleman! You've a kind, lucky face and you'll have a handsome wife and a dozen fat children!'

From an old Bedfordshire gipsy woman (*perhaps one of the Samsons*), *and retold to me by a folk-lorist correspondent who heard it in a tent near the Elstree and Watford bypass, 1930s. The gipsies were moving to Wales by horse-caravan. They were related to Patrick Fury.*

NOTES The letter containing this *tale was* almost destroyed by fire and the fragments had to be linked together from memory. The writer was killed in a London air raid in *594.3*.

Mrs Fury had all gold teeth. She came from a Surrey tribe and was familiar with the libel regarding the Hearnes.

The tradition of the Treasure of Maple Durham has developed into a proverb (see Pt Three, No. 2).

3

The Sea Terror

Somerset (Severn Coast)

My father used to tell us that there was a big fish off Berrow Sands and it had a huge mouth. It used to swallow all the fish and the sailors too, and what it didn't finish the conger eels did. They used to bark at those times

and people knew the big fish was hungry and the fishermen were in danger.

Well, there was a bold fisherman who went out in his little boat and the big fish opened his great mouth to take him and he cast his anchor down its throat and the cold iron finished it.

Told by members of Brean W.I. in 1961.

NOTES There were said to be giant sea-anglers on the Burnham and Berrow coast.

Compare the Kingston St Mary dragon tale in *Somerset Folk Lore*, Pt III, p. 129, published by the Folk Lore Society in 1945.

4

Black Annis

Leicestershire

Black Annis lived in the Danehills.

She was ever so tall and had a blue face and had long white teeth and she ate people. She only went out when it was dark.

My mum says, when she ground her teeth people could hear her in time to bolt their doors and keep well away from the one window. That's why we don't have a lot of big windows in Leicestershire cottages, she can't only get an arm inside.

My mum says that's why we have the fire and chimney in a corner.

The fire used to be on the earth floor once and people slept all round it until Black Annis grabbed the babies out the window. There wasn't any glass in that time.

When Black Annis howled you could hear her five miles away and then even the poor folk in the huts fastened skins across the window and put witch-herbs above it to keep her away safe.

My mum told us there was a wicked stepmother who sent her three little children out near Christmastide to gather wood when it got dark earlier than this is [a dark lunchtime, Christmas Eve 1941]. They were ever so cold and frightened and little Dicky he cried.

‘Don’t cry, Dicky lad,’ says Jim. ‘Don’t be frighted. ’Tis Christmas Eve. You can’t be hurted noways.’

‘Why?’ says Dicky.

‘There’s no bad’uns about,’ says Jen.

‘Why?’ says Dicky.

“Tis Our Lord’s birthday and the bells ring,’ they said. ‘If the bad’uns hear them they die.’

So off they went to the wood and picked a big load each. It was getting dark and they had a long way back and they were so tired and little Dicky cried and so did Jen. ‘It’s getting dark and she may not have gone under the earth yet. I’m going to run.’

But she couldn’t with all her load of firewood.

Then Jim said, ‘I’ve got a holed stone and if you like I’ll look through it and see. But she’ll be right underground with the covers over her ears till after Christmas.’

But she wasn’t, she’d forgotten the day and Jim saw her five miles off.

It wasn’t quite dark yet and they tried to make haste. Then Jim looked again. ‘She’s only a mile away,’ he whispered, but they couldn’t go any faster until they heard a yell.

Then they did run till thy dropped.

‘She won’t come now,’ says Jim. ‘She’ll stop to eat that ragged, drunken old woman I saw—I think it was Stepmother come to look for us.’

‘I hope it were,’ say Jen and little Dicky. ‘We’re nearly home now.’

So they rested just a bit longer and then little Dicky says, ‘It’s coming on near dark,’ and Jen says, ‘There’s something grinding teeth. Look through the stone, Jim.’

So Jim looked and it was Black Annis only half a mile behind them. She hadn’t liked the taste of that beery old stepmother, so she only snapped off her head and come on again.

‘Drop your faggot across the path, little Dicky, and run for home!’ says Jim.

So Black Annis bruised her legs and ran back to her cave to get an ointment to stop the bleeding. My mum says if a witch bleeds she loses all her power and dies.

And didn’t Jim and Jen run too! But she wasn’t scratched bad and back she come. She was only a quarter mile away when Jim looked, so they both dropped their faggots to trip her and ran for it.

Black Annis fell flat on her face over the firing but she caught up with them at their cottage door where their dad stood with an axe. And he threw it right in her face and her nose bled like a pig and she yelled and ran for her cave crying, ‘Blood! Blood!’ but the Christmas bells started pealing and she fell down far away and died.

Then the children kissed their dad and he’d brought a great load of firewood himself, and the stepmother was dead, and it was Christmas Eve so they made a big fire and had kippers and butter for tea. (‘*Butter?*’ said a rationed boy listener, ‘Coo! what a feast!’)

‘It was Christmas Eve,’ said the tale teller firmly, ‘and the old stepmother had been hiding all their rations to sell to the grocer’s man so she could buy beer.’

(‘Did they find Black Annis?’ I asked.)

‘The crows picked her bones—but one of my uncles he found a long tooth—ever so sharp it is—that’s how I know it’s quite true.’

Told by an evacuee Leicester girl on 24 December 1941, as we ate our lunch of wartime sandwiches, sitting on a haymow in Hilield Barn on the dark and frosty Christmas Eve of 1941.

NOTES Black Annis is credited with being an early goddess. Traditionally she was a supernatural cannibal hag, but the ‘bleeding of the witch’ places her well in mortal witch-lore. Compare the Border tale, ‘The Little Wee Tyke’, Pt One, No. 19.

5

The Shuck

Norfolk/Suffolk

My great-grandad hated my dog—it was white and he tried to throw it into Harwich Harbour. Well, I went in after it and we nearly drowned, both of us. He was a big dog but my father came out in a skiff and got us aboard, and took us up river quite a way. He said the Harwich men would throw us both back since we’d brought bad luck. They drown all white dogs there, because my father says they think they bring the floods. And when they had the bad ones [’ 95osi, even my father believed a pack of white dogs ran along the harbour before they happened. Great-Grandad, he wasn’t a

sailor like my father or fisherman like my uncles—we're all seafarers; he came from Potter Heigham way down to Dover-court and he used to drive a pony round the countryside and into Essex, with fish and bread and higglers' stuff for the farms. He always went in daylight if he could or stayed overnight. There's deep water on either side some roads, and on others after dark you might meet up with Lady Anne Bullen's coach coming out by her old road, or something queer and chancy near Fayer's Knoll, but worst of all was the Shuck. Even my father won't talk about him, but I don't mind (I spent the War on a minesweeper).

He's big like a calf or donkey, sometimes he's white but most times they'll tell you he's black and his eyes light up like lamps.

Well, one time my great-grandad had been kept and it was early winter and the moon was up, and they were making a rattling pace for home—the old pony was a good Norfolk trotter—when something black jumped out of the hedge, and tried to get into the back of the cart.

The pony ran like hell and my great-grandad he yells and takes just one look and there sitting behind him all among the fish and breathing in his ears was the Black Shuck. The road there was straight and they took it like a streak of lightning but when they had to turn the corner, the pony had the whole cart over and Great-Grandad he was pitched out on his head. My father and uncles came out as soon as light and found him. The cart was a wreck and the pony had limped home, and never did a day's work after.

No, I don't think I believe in such a creature, not here in London town anyway, but I don't say I'd like to meet up with him.

From a Yarmouth sailor, about 1955.

NOTES Compare 'The Collingbourne Kingston Black Dog', Pt One, No. 21; 'The Hound of the Hill', Pt Two, No. 9; and 'The Farys' Mist-gate', Pt Two, No. 6.

Two

The People of the Hills

6 The Farys' Mist-gate
7 The Grig's Red Cap
8 The Two Ponies
9 The Hound of the Hill
10 Jack-with-the-Lantern

6

The Farys' Mist-gate

Oxfordshire/Gloucestershire (Cotswolds)

There was a little lad lost his baby sister just before Christmas. The farys took her and his father and mother were heartbroke, so he reckoned he had better do summat about it, and he went to the right kind of help.

His mother's white cat sat by the fire on Christmas Eve so he knew she could talk to him.

'Kit-Cat, Kit-Cat,
Help me get our baby back,'

he said and the White Kit-Cat she told him true.

‘I am not a black one, so I’m wise and good. Come on—quick, we will get the help you do need.’ And she ran out into the moonlight and he ran too, barefoot and in his shirt.

‘Hurry, hurry!’ says White Kit-Cat. ‘We must be there and back before the Christmas bells begin. Have you brought a bit of salt?’

It was in his handkerchief and away they went to the parson’s dickey.

‘Let him ride on your back,’ says White Kit-Cat. ‘He can hold your long ears, and the farys will not dare come nigh for his salt and your cross and you can take the baby and go like the wind.’

‘How will I get *inside* their hill, let alone find their mist-gate?’ says the dickey.

‘It is open now,’ says White Kit-Cat. ‘They are going to shut it soon so that they cannot hear the Christmas bells underground and they will be snug and safe—you must gallop.’

‘And I will come and keep the mist-door open,’ says the black Church Grim. ‘I can hear them piping and dancing around the hawthorn tree. Never mind the magic mist. They have left the baby on the floor inside the hill. You must not get off the dickey’s back so I will come and lift the baby up for you; and as soon as ever you can, put a cross of salt on its little face.’

So they all went to the fary hill and it was open wide and the farys were all dancing and piping on the top under the tree.

In went Church Grim and in went parson’s dickey and the lad with the salt, and White Kit-Cat kept watch outside.

Then out they came like a gale of wind, the Church Grim, parson’s dickey, the lad with the salt and the baby in his arms and White Kit-Cat took a leap up by the dickey’s tail—and that made him go faster than thought.

By the time they were all coming up to churchyard the farys were on their heels, skreeking like hullets, but they got safe into the church porch and the lad made the cross of salt on the baby’s face.

The farys were silent, but when Church Grim took hold of a bell rope to begin ringing there wasn’t one to be seen.

They shut their hill tight when the bells started up and the lad thanked parson’s dickey and Church Grim and took the baby home.

White Kit-Cat was there snug by the fire as if she had never moved a whisker but the lad could hear his poor mother crying.

‘Stop it, mam!’ he calls, ‘I’ve gotten our baby safe home, you and Dad come and see.’

And they did soon enough, while the lad warmed his cold toes and White Kit-Cat blinked as lazy as you like but said nothing.

First heard in the Midlands in about 1920, from my Uncle Will. I do not know from which county, or from whom, my uncle heard this tale, but lam almost certain it was from Oxfordshire or the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire.

NOTES In this tale, the word ‘fairy’ is pronounced ‘far-y’.
Dickey—a donkey.
Church Grim—a Black Dog ghost which guards the churchyards and sometimes rings the bells. It could break the magic of the mist, being a church servant.
Salt and *the cross on the donkey’s back* were both safeguards against evil.
Mist-gate—a magic gap in the mist surrounding a fairy spot.
On Christmas Eve, cats were addressed in rhyme.

7

The Grig’s Red Cap

Middlesex

There were two labourers crossing Stanmore Common when the grigs were playing in the bracken. Two of them put on their red caps and vanished but the third was in such a panic that he pulled the red cap too hard and he fell into it like a sack. Then all he could do was keep still till the men passed on, but one of them saw the red hat.

‘Here’s luck,’ said he. ‘A nice, large, red cap.’

‘Leave it lay,’ says t’other man.

Not me—I’m needing a smart hat myself.’

‘Leave it lay,’ says his mate, very worried.

But no, not he. He puts it on right over his ears and if the grig was unhappy before, now he couldn’t even breathe. He began to kick and twist and pull hair and thump, and so did the labourer only he gave himself the beating.

His mate watched him while he yelled, ‘There’s the father and mother of all harnets inside it, and don’t I know it.’

And somehow he dragged it off.

The red cap was out of his reach in a second and something shot out of it and was gone with it crying, ‘You was told to leave it lay.’

Then all the bracken rang with grig laughter and the men ran like hell.

Heard from old Harry White, a groom at Stanmore, 1936. Also from the Welsh marshes, 1912.

NOTES *Grigs*—small, merry fairies dressed in green with red stocking caps or red flower hats. The proverbial expression, ‘as merry as a grig’, is widespread over England.
Harness—hornets.

8

The Two Ponies

Warwickshire

When I was fourteen years old I went as under-nurserymaid to the Hall to look after her ladyship’s two little children. Beautiful little children, Miss Ailsa and Master Ian were, with yellow curls and pink cheeks.

The nurse was Mrs Sinclair who’d come from the north of Scotland with her ladyship when she married. She was very severe but kind with it. She was my mother-in-law later on, and I loved her as much as my own mother.

Her son Donald, who was to be my dear husband, was like me then just fourteen and an under-groom. Her ladyship’s mother sent the children a pair of tiny ponies all the way from the Shetland Islands—dear, friendly little pets with heavy coats that mustn’t be clipped. And Donald Sinclair had the sole care of them, and hours and hours of brushing their coats and long tails and manes did he put in, and even the head groom, Mr Wootton, allowed they looked a picture.

Then one day when the little children had been led up and down the garden paths (for they had to be held they were so small, and Donald had Master Ian and I had Miss Ailsa and those dear, good ponies know how to walk on and where to go without being led) my Donald said to me, ‘Lizzie, how can / get a word to her ladyship?’

It wasn’t to be heard of, of course, and it must have been very important, for Donald looked frighted at the very daring of it.

‘Won’t Mr Wootton do?’ I said. ‘He is head groom and the proper one to be told.’

Donald shook his head.

‘Or your mother?’ I said.

‘He wouldn’t believe me and give me a guid clout and ma mither she’d be all in a terrible fright for the bairns. Oh, what will I do!’ says poor Donald and the tears stood in his eyes. ‘They’ve tellt me to turn the ponies graze (they were never stable-kept) in yon field fornenst the Oak Wood.’

Well, I’d heard Mrs Sinclair myself and what she thought of the Oak Wood and I was never, never to go near it with Miss Ailsa and Master Ian. She believed there was a wicked band of fairises there, black-hearted and all in black, and they stole pretty little children right away for ever—especially if they had yellow hair. And I took great pains to mind for I was frighted myself.

Her ladyship was away and the next morning I slipped down to the stable yard where I was not supposed to go unless I had a message and I got there to say to Mr Wootton that the ponies were not to be used that day.

Mr Wootton was giving my poor Donald half-a-dozen with a leather belt because their coats were tangled and dirty and the ponies were worn out.

‘D’ye call that grooming?’ says Mr Wootton and Donald had been brushing for hours.

‘I was at the brushing and scraping and strapping for three hours. They’re soakt wi’ sweat,’ says my Donald.

I was almost crying too but remembered I mustn’t.

‘They’re sweating still, you idle good-for-nought,’ says Mr Wootton giving Donald another cut. ‘I’ll make a good groom of you yet!’

Now Mr Wootton was really very proud of my Donald and had trusted him over the heads of other grooms to look after the children and ponies for a steady, trustworthy boy as he was. So he lost his temper and what would have happened I don’t know—perhaps Donald would be turned away from the Hall but old Mr Venn, the head gardener, came by for water and he took one look at the ponies and says straight out, ‘Did ’ee tell the lad to graze by Oak Wood? You ought to know better than that. Look at “Their” [fairises’] stirrups in these manes and the burrs. “They’ve” throuned to spoil their tails, and been hard ridden all night I don’t wonder.

Yew listen to me for once and ask others why the Oak Wood pasture is never used.'

Donald and me felt much better to find Mr Venn wasn't blaming him at all and then they both told him to take the ponies to the lower lawn where there were apple-trees and sweet grass and would be under their eyes too —and so could we see them from the nursery windows and the little children liked that. The ponies weren't ridden that day but left to dry off in the sun and rest while Donald kept watch and was able to give them a brush down before dark, and pull the burrs from their manes and tails, and untangle the fairises' stirrup knots.

Next morning early when I looked out I couldn't see the little ponies quiet and happy on the lower lawn but after breakfast I saw them and somehow they looked bad—quite different like. Her ladyship had come home the night before and came out on the terrace to see the ponies was safe and well and wanted to know why they were there. I had brought the little children down to ride but the ponies weren't even saddled yet and Mrs Sinclair couldn't think what ailed Donald to be so late and come to tell her ladyship so. Now, when *she* saw the ponies she caught hold of Miss and Master tight, and tried to stop Donald going to put a hand on those fierce, pretty creatures but her ladyship was looking too, with a white face, and cried out to him to come to her at *once*. 'I nearly caught them, ma'am', says Donald very upset but she says, 'Stay here!' and she steps forward and calls in a clear, brave voice, 'There are no bairns here for you to carry away,' and Mrs Sinclair stood by her and called too, 'Tangye! Shoopiltee! I'm *naming names*. Off with ye back! Gang awa tae North noo!' And the fierce, wild ponies were not there any more. Then her ladyship took my hand and said, 'We need three who love the bairns to call.' And then they called and I tried too, and while Donald held the little children, we cried 'Leave Oak Wood and go—in the Holy Name!'

And Mr Venn told us later the keepers saw the great crowd of black weasels running away to the north, and they couldn't shoot one, but they brought our own poor, lame, over-ridden little ponies back from the wood.

This tale probably dates back to about 1832. It was written down in 1918 on various visits by a District Visitor, who was told it by a bed-ridden old house-keeper of about eightyfiveyears old. She was Mrs Donald Sinclair, who was born in Warwickshire. The tale was sent to my uncle at Streetly who collected tales for me.

NOTES *Shoopiltee* and *tangye* are dangerous water ponies from the Isles. If a hand is laid on them, they run off with the human being stuck to them and drag their captive *deep* below the water.

Naming names—to call an uncanny creature by its *true* name makes it obedient to one's wishes. To give a name to anyone or anything without leave is most unlucky.

Black weasels were evil, shape-shifting fairies.

Oak wood—a fairy haunt in any county.

Fairises—Uncle's Black-Country maid, on hearing the tale, referred to the evil fairies as 'those li'le black boggartys'.

9

The Hound of the Hill

Cheshire

There was a labourer's lad coming home late and weary in the dusk and he saw something white and red in the bushes.

He thought it was a foot-sore foxhound and he called it out kindly, 'Come on then, lad, I'll take thee back to kennels slow and careful. See and I'll wrap they poor feet in wet leaves to cool them.'

Then he found some big dock leaves and drenched them in the running stream and called the dog again but when it came it was bigger than a calf with a rough, white coat and red-brown ears.

It was one of the fairy hounds from the hill who bring death or ill-luck.

The lad was shaken with fear but he wasn't going to waste good leaves and water. 'Give us your paw then, lad,' said he, though he knew you mustn't even speak or move, and he took the great pads one by one and bandaged them up, and said, 'Now *you* can get home and *I'll* be off to mine. Good night, sir.'

And the Hound of the Hill wagged his tail.

Nothing happened to the lad till he had to come that dark road round November and then he met a huge, black, wild goat with bright-lit green eyes and terrible hoofs and horns.

This time the lad knew he mustn't run, but it took some standing steady and he was at his wits' end what to be at next. The goat come roaring and pawing right at him and just as he thought he'd be killed, a huge white and

red hound leapt on the goat's back and turned him round and the two unket beasts fought till the woods rang and the terrified lad could only see by the glow of their green eyes.

The goat got the worst of it and turned himself into an owl and flew off and the great Hound of the Hill looked once at the lad and wagged his tail.

The lad knew better than to say 'Thank you', but he touched his cap politely and said 'Good night, sir,' and went on home.

The source of the tale is Long Mynd. It was told by Mrs Foden in 1917. Also heard from some Cheshire E.F.D.S.S. friends in 1960.

NOTES Many folk-tales are founded on the theme of politeness and kindness, and kindness rewarded.

One wonders what the dog's pads felt like. I imagine this variant of the Gaelic Taroo-Water Bull and helper combat came south by drover or pedlar.

The goat here is not the Devil but the Celtic *phooka*, which is a 'shape-shifter' and can appear in goat-like form.

10

Jack-with-the-Lantern

Wiltshire/North Dorset

There was an ancient old shepherd called Jacob and he was reckoned very knowledgeable and a wonder with the sheep and his old dog, Tan, was considered nearly as wise as he, but they were both getting along in years and the farmer thought best to find them a pair of helpers, man and dog, for Old Jacob and Tan to train up in their way.

'If them'm ready to lam Old Jacob and Tan will larn 'em kind and steady, and if they'm stubborn they can find out fast enough the hard way,' says Farmer.

So he sent for a lad and his clever young bitch that had quite a name down the valley for being real lively at the work. 'Young enough to be lamed and sharp enough to heed,' says Farmer to Old Jacob.

The young boy and Fan come all right, proud as a cow with two tails to be given such a chance of a job and show Farmer what they could do in the way of rounding up twenty sheep and 'twas all over and done in five

minutes with the boy and the bitch between ’em and come back prouder than ever to Farmer. He was stood watching with Old Jacob, and Tan lying quiet at their feet.

‘All bark and hustle and whistle,’ says Farmer. ‘Sheep don’t like bustle. You’ll have trouble herding them after that. They won’t forget.’

The boy and his Fan didn’t care for the sound of that at all, but was certain sure they knowed better.

Then Farmer says, ‘Show ’em, Old Jacob,’ and Old Jacob just says quiet, ‘There’s a limpetty ewe keep’s in the middle whichever way they’ll turn—fetch her out, Tan!’

Well, then Tan goes gentle past the flock as was facing and stamping every ways at once and they watched him go on out around and lay down quiet. Sheep knowed Tan and took comfort at his guarding ’em, and begun to nibble again, then old Tan walk in among ’em friendly and quiet and brings out lame ewe without most of ’em their heads.

Old Jacob gets out his tar tin and cleans the cut. Tan lays down and Farmer turns to boy and bitch. ‘You’ll need a bit longer afore either can do that with a frightened flock. Best larn how. Puppies and boys be always in a girt scramble. Sheep an’t.’

Well then, even after that the boy thought Old Jacob silly slow, didn’t handle Tan with whistling, didn’t do anything but speak a word or two to Tan who was slow and steady too, and far too old, and ought to be shot—even Fan found him dull—he never raced and chased and made the sheep move any faster than a good even walk.

Old Jacob was more patient than Farmer who came up one day to see the two pairs at work and found the hugeous flock coming over the downs suent [obedient, docile], but the lad was scowling at the back and Fan was whimpering to rush at the heels of the last and Tan was just bringing them as steady as Time right back to where Old Jacob stood.

‘Larn ’em gentle?’ says Farmer. ‘But he’ve a bad temper towards our Tan. Watch out, Jacob. The bitch is clever, I’ll not deny, but I’m thinking they’ll both need to lam with a leather strap.’

Old Jacob looks down at Tan lying quiet by the flock and at Fan all a-quiver to be off in a bustle, and at boy’s scowling face, and says slowly, ‘’Twan’t be too long neither now if we’m going to make proper shepherds of the pair.’

Well, the day of proof came in the middle of lambing-time. Fan was growing useful if boy didn't always excite her to fullishness—she 'd sooner copy Tan at work and not rush with the boy, but he was her master. Tan was getting stiff-jointed after a snow-scad and Old Jacob kept him in sheep-hut where he could lick and keep orphan lambs warm.

There was only twins and Old Jacob felt the loss of the mother deeply. He prided himself that Farmer hadn't lost a ewe for years, but these were twins, and the double cost the dam her life. The lambs would have died too, but for Tan's care.

When it was dark, boy and Fan come back from rounding up the stragglers into the folds.

Boy should have been pleased to be trusted but he came in too cock-a-hoop and aimed a toe at Tan but thought better of it when he seed Old Jacob look his way. 'Fan and me brought in twenty-one,' says he proudly.

'Then where's the very three missing ewes near their time as was wanted particles,' says Old Jacob grimly. 'You and Fan been in one of your bustles and gone too fast for they.'

''Tis coming up fog and more snow,' grumble the boy, 'and cold as death.'

'Then go out and die finding 'em, the silly pair of you. You han't even begun to be a shepherd yet—I can't leave this beast, she's in trouble in her labour. But Tan will go and help you. He's saved the lives of foolish ewes in deep snow worse than this mist and scat and I'll follow if I can later, with the lantern. 'Tis real trouble this.'

Tan was already outside the lambing-shed waiting in the dark, so out goes boy like a hod-me-dod all a-shiver, and Fan with a bark and a little wag of a willing tail, and when they got out of sight in the fog boy lets Tan have it with his boot-end, and Tan just give him a nice slash with his old teeth as made him think again. Be black and blue his leg would, and limp for days he would, and he counted himself lucky Old Jacob hadn't seen that kick.

But someone else had and meant to pay it back even better than Tan.

Jack-with-the-Lantern came at nights to sit on the lambing-shed roof and savour the warmth of the hut, and the pannikin of ewes' milk Old Jacob put out at nights for him. Jack-with-the-Lantern liked the old man for thinking of mist and snow and biting wind at night and giving a bit of warmth and comfort and he hadn't forgotten Fan golloping up the cream

just *once*. She never did it again and boy couldn't think why she bolted into shed squealing like a nestletripe [young pig].

Tan knew, and Old Jacob, but they didn't let on, and Fan wasn't too eager to rush out at night unless boy was with her. But this time she had boy and Tan so she rushed off a bit stiff after the other trudge but ready to rush back and make a big noise about it all and she passed clean through the fust gate out onto the downs and boy followed, but Tan lay down by gate-ditch and didn't move.

So boy fetched him a crack on the head with his crook (out of reach this time!) and limped on into the fog and there up before him he saw a beckoning lantern. 'Old Jacob, he came arter all,' he thought and he wasn't too ready to tell him about Tan so he didn't hurry too hard. Fan was up there barking and the lantern went bobbing in between mist and snow-scads and boy followed. Well then, that lantern went bobbing and Fan went rushing and barking and boy limped and shivered and never quite caught up until Jack-with-the-Lantern led 'em right knee-deep into a nice, marshy, frosty spring—then he give a queery-like laugh and *went out*. Well, if it was cold and dark afore, it was black and bitter cold now, and they crawled along, boy crying and Fan whimpering, without a notion where they was to until Farmer's Lass barked at 'en and Farmer bringed a real lantern to 'en.

'I be takin' the nuss lambs [the orphans] back for missus to bring up off the bottle. First in ten years, and where may you two be a-dawdling to

'O measter,' blubbered the boy, 'we bin miles looking for they three ewes due to lamb.'

'Due to lamb?' says farmer. 'Tan bringed 'en in from gate-ditch just outside fold and a job it took him on account of a sore muzzle. My Lass she helped pull 'en out just in time. They'm all the better for Old Jacob's help now. Three nice lambs, and *only just in time*. Tan knew better than to bustle 'em and got a bloody snout for it. Now even I know better than to lay hand on another man's dog. You goo in and face up to Old Jacob and he'll finish your schooling the hard way.' And away the Farmer went with the nuss lambs warm in an old coat and Lass at heel and *his* lantern shining.

Boy (he were a good boy at heart, but stubborn) he give shuddering, soaked, frozen Fan a pat and says, 'Come lass, let's take our leathering and get warm again.'

Then something gave an eerie-queery laugh and a lantern shone on shed roof-top and Old Jacob came to the door with a strap in his hand and they went in.

Fan scuttled in against the wall behind Tan who licked her warm with his bloody muzzle and Old Jacob give the boy a smart dozen with the strap, then he stopped. ‘I reckon Tan paid the rest,’ he said. ‘Now get outside your porridge both of ’ee unless you’m warm enough.’

And Jack-with-the-Lantern sat out on the roof in the mist and laughed again and again until another bowl of porridge come outside for him.

One of the Clayton Jones collection; it originated in about 1920. Taken from rough notes only, and completed in 1968. The dialect belongs to north Dorset.

NOTES In my childhood, many sheepdogs were called ‘Tan’, regardless of colour. It means ‘two’ in the sheep-counting formula of several counties. I have known of at least five dogs of that name.

Jack-with-the-Lantern is the Wiltshire downland name for a Will-o’-the-Wisp. Jacky-my-Lantern is the Somerset–Dorset name for him.

Handling sheep—there is some very wise sheep-lore in this tale, which was known and practised most of the time up to the twentieth century. Ewes near their lambing time will often seek a dry ditch, and it needs strength and persuasion to move them to quarters easier for both shepherd and mother.

Three

Legends and Folk-tales

11 London City
12 Food and Fire and Company
13 The Wounded Swan
14 Silly Kit and Down-a-down
15 Silken Janet (or Mucketty Meg)

11

London City

Surrey

It that the Devil and an met outside London City.

‘It is all mine to destroy,’ saith the Devil. ‘There is no goodness or piety or kindliness to be found therein.’ Let us first see,’ said the angel.

So forthwith they passed over London Bridge under the heads of traitors and the Devil rejoiced to see them there. ‘Kindliness!’ he made mock. So they went thereafter to a tavern that had a roaring fire and men and women lay rolling in drunken beastliness before it. ‘Mine !’ claimed the Devil. ‘This is Hell on Earth.’ But the angel led him to a dark corner wherein a very old woman had a little child upon her lap and taught it to lisp its

prayers. ‘Here is still Piety,’ said the angel. So again they went forth to the Bear Pit and here all was blood and tonnent and clamour. ‘Cruelty,’ crieth the Devil and he laughed well. The men were yelling, the dogs were barking or howling and the great bear struck out with his hurt paws and growled perilously. ‘Cruelty—such as Hell knows,’ saith the Devil again but the angel pointed to a corner of a wall where a young lad tore up his ragged coat to bind the wounds of a bloody hound. ‘Even here is still compassion,’ saith the angel.

So they went their way across the river to Southwark and entered a house with red lattices. Here all was a sinful riot of raffish young men and bedizened trulls in feathers and silks and the songs they sang were all purely filthy and their jestings were blasphemous. The Devil rubbed his claws. ‘Mine! Mine to destroy!’

But the angel led him above stairs to a great bedroom where there was a cage in the window with a new-caught lark in it. Then there came running a painted girl in tawdry finery who released the lark and let it fly away. ‘I shall be well beaten for this,’ she said, ‘but alas, I am no longer free to follow it.’

Then she ran downstairs again quickly. Saith the angel, ‘Here is still Repentance,’ and therewith they left London City and went each their own way.

‘I shall return in fifty years,’ saith the Devil. ‘There will be none then to stay my destruction, for this hellish town must be purged by pestilence and fire and I shall do it.’ And it was so.

This seventeenth-century fragment was told by a Civil Service telephonist during the terrible Spanish ‘flu epidemic in London in 1918. Her great-aunt declared that the tale 1667. The this history it.

She had an old great-uncle who used to ferret about in secondhand book-stalls for old parchments which he trimmed and cleaned of any writing and sold, often to lawyers. This fragment, written in very faded ink, was among them. Her great-aunt, a Methodist, liked it and learned it before it was destroyed, and taught it to thefamily, who still remembered a garbled version of it.

The telephonist said herfamily regarded the telling of the tale as a death omen, andyet, oddly enough, under rising crowd hysteria, she seemed impelled to repeat it. She worked in our office, and within a day of telling the tale she was absent. The next day we heard that she was dead. We had expected it. Amongst our small staff, we had lost nine—six dead and three invalided. Most of the staff worked in the basements of our Mayfair headquarters, and had to make short cuts to work, buses being scarce and overfull, along narrow back streets, many of which were finally closed of, black flags being displayed.

12

Food and Fire and Company

Staffordshire/Derbyshire

An old woman lived in a cottage on a hillside. It was a very little cottage with a door and one window and a garden in which the old woman could grow a few herbs.

The cottage had a good, stout door and a window and roof of stone slabs that kept out the rain, and a well-swept floor. She was a very clean and tidy old woman and in the corner she had dry brushwood and some piles of turves which the farmer brought her when he remembered. He was a kind man, but forgetful.

Besides the turves he sometimes brought her straw or hay to make her a soft bed in the other corner, and the farmer's wife sent her an old stew-pot to hang on the crook in the chimney and a mended patchwork quilt for her bed.

So there she was with a warm, soft bed, and a fire, and four stout walls and a good roof overhead. She had a wooden bowl and two wooden spoons that farmer's boy had carved for her and oatmeal to sup when the farmer remembered.

Then one day the tinman came by with his loaded cart at a gallop. He was running away from the gamekeepers, for he had a load of ducks and rabbits under his tins.

The old woman went to her gate as the keepers came up. And there in the road was a nice tin mug that had rolled off the cart.

'He won't come back this way any more,' said the gamekeeper. You'd best have it to put in your neat little house. Very clean and comfortable it is.'

The old woman smiled at him and then she sighed a little. 'I be very lucky, I am,' she said. 'I've four stout walls and a good roof and a good door, a warm bed and firing and I'm making me a twig broom to sweep the hearth—but I wouldn't mind a bit of company.'

The gamekeepers went away again, but first one brought in another armful of dry branches for her and the other took a flat cake from his

wallet and put it on the window-seat. ‘Food and firing and company,’ he said, ‘and here you’ve got all three.’

After they had gone, the old woman broke the sticks neatly and put them in their corner and made up the fire and filled the stew-pot with spring water and shook up the bed nicely and swept the floor with a bunch of fern, and everything was clean and tidy again. So she put her last handful of meal in the pot to make a warm gruel for the morning in case the farmer forgot to bring her sackful. ‘‘Tis dusty stuff, meal,’ said the old woman. ‘I must make my twig broom tomorrow.’

Then she drank some spring water from the tin mug and broke a bit off the flat cake and went to bed.

The next day the farmer came—his wife had remembered—and he brought meal, and a goose wing to sweep the hearth and a small gooseberry bush for the garden and battered wooden bucket for the water but it was half-full of new milk.

‘There!’ said Farmer. Now you’ve got four stout walls and a door, a good roof and a good fire, food and drink, and a soft bed. What more can you want?’

But he didn’t remember to ask for any rent and he never did.

‘What a busy time I’m having,’ said the old woman when he had gone. ‘Two visitors yesterday and another today—but I’d dearly like them to stay a bit for company. I’ll make a dish of milk-porridge, that’s what I’ll do, and while it cooks I’ll tidy up.’

So she made enough porridge for two and hung it to cook over the bright fire and she swept the hearth with the goose wing and carried out her bed to air in the sun while she took a sharp stick and dug a hole for the gooseberry bush and planted it. Then she carried back her hay bed in the quilt and shook it up in its corner and spread the quilt over it, and swept all the bits of hay off the floor with the goose wing into the fire and then she was quite ready to sit in the window-seat and drink warm milk in a tin mug and nibble a bit more flat cake and count all her blessings.

‘How lucky I am,’ she said. ‘I have a beautiful spring at my gate, and a gooseberry bush in my garden, a good door, four stout walls and a good roof, a good bed, and a good fire, a crock of milk-porridge and half of the gamekeeper’s flat cake, a bowl and a tin mug and two spoons—but Farmer forgot the turves and there are only four left—I must be careful. The sun is warm so I’ll go to bed warm too.’

Then she said, Tut I'd dearly like someone to come and share it.' So before she went to bed she poured out half of the milk-porridge into the bowl and set a bit of the cake beside it and put it outside the door and called out into the listening dark, 'Come and eat a bit. You're very welcome whoever you are, but I'm afraid there isn't much.'

When she opened the door in the morning the bowl was empty and the bit of cake was gone.

'Now, who took that I wonder?' she said. 'They're very welcome— but I'd dearly like their company a bit.'

Now four miles away on the other side of the valley was the Manor House. It was hundreds of years old and folk said it was lucky. It had a great garden full of roses and the scent of the red ones came on the wind across to the old woman and was so lovely she could have stood sniffing it all day, but today there was no scent at all. "Tis the rain maybe,' she said, though she felt it wasn't. 'I'll be soaked standing here.'

And when Farmer came he was soaked too, and so were the turves his wife had reminded him to bring, and of course he couldn't keep the carthorse standing in the drenching rain so he was off and away fast, but he did pass on a bit of news first.

'The old Squire died in London and a rich London nephew has come to the Manor with a parcel of fine city servants. The old servants won't work for him since he turned out the luck.'

'Oh dear, whatever did he do?'

'He found the bowl of milk and a bit of bread put by for "you know who" as has been done for hundreds of years and he threw it to his dog. Things won't prosper for him and he won't get any fine servants to bide there.'

The old woman felt quite upset, what with the wet turves, and the farmer's boots had made such a mess, and she was bent two-double with the aches in her bones, it took her nearly all day.

'I'll bake a couple of flat cakes,' she said, ''twill take off my aches and pains.' So she kneaded them and laid them to cook on the warm hearth. Then she remembered to put out the tin mug and the last of the keeper's cake and call out her welcome. 'I shall have porridge and cake of my own,' she thought, but the rain fell and the turves wouldn't catch and the fire just smouldered and the old woman sat and shivered.

Then, out of the night came a strange voice and something scratched on her door.

Oh dear oh,
Where can I go,
In rain and snow?

Oh dear oh,
What can I do?
Let me come in
And stay with you.

‘Poor thing,’ said the old woman, ‘I’ll ask it in out of the rain.’ Then she thought a bit—‘It may be a ghost! Well, the poor thing needs comfort instead of wandering about—or it may be Summat Else,’ but she called out bravely, ‘Come in and welcome, whoever you are, though the fire don’t burn very well!’ And a thin, brown hand slid round the door and Summat Else slid round it too. The old woman hobbled to close the door and out of the corner of her eye saw something small and brownish slither along the wall and leap up into the chimney.

The rain poured in and the wind blew until she had barred the door.

There was just a spark in the embers so she blew them into a faint glow and crawled into bed. ‘You chose a good spot if it’s still warm,’ she called out, ‘but the fire won’t light us and warm us tonight. I’m sorry there’s no porridge for you.’ Then she shivered and went to sleep.

She woke suddenly and lay watching a warm light that glowed in the cottage and flickered on the rafters and the stag’s horn pegs that held the roof slabs in place. Where did the light come from and what was that lovely smell of baking? She sat up puzzled; the fire was flaming, the porridge was cooking, the two cakes were brown and smelling lovely, and there was a neat pile of brown, dry turves stacked near the fire. The old woman looked and looked and then she called out, ‘Thank you kindly whoever you are and now we’ll have a bit of supper.’ Then she got up and poured out the milk-porridge into two portions and she put one cake into one of the bowls to stand on the hearth and she ate the rest herself. Oh, she was hungry! Then she called out again, ‘Thank you kindly,’ and went back to bed and fell fast asleep.

In the morning the sun was shining and there came a knock at the door and there was Farmer. ‘You sleep late,’ he said. ‘My missus wants to know if you’ve such a thing as a rosebud in your hedge. She wants it for the well-dressing down in the village. ‘Tis a pity you live so far out, with that flat rock over your spring you could make a fine picture in flower petals for the judges to see.’

The old woman sighed. ‘Ah, but I can’t stoop to pick ‘em and I can’t climb to get ‘em, though I’d like fine to make a picture with flowers over my stream. Here’s the rose for your missus.’ When he went away she sighed again. ‘’Twould have been something to think about and I do love flowers and the well-dressing is very pretty to see. Dear, dear, how late it’s getting—I must get tidied up and bake some more cakes when I’ve got the fire going.’ But when she went in the fire was burning. There were two cakes on the hearth, her bed was made and the floor swept. She was so surprised that she sat down and ate her breakfast without another word.

‘I shall have time to do a bit in the garden,’ she said, when she had finished. ‘I wonder if I could find a flower or two for my rock.’ Then she opened the door again and the cottage was filled with a lovely scent. ‘How beautiful those Manor roses scent this morning air. You could almost think they were at my gate.’ And that was exactly where they were, great piles of crimson petals, heaped neatly beside her spring. There were other flowers too, blues and yellows and whites and pinks. The old woman gave a gasp of joy. Then she spread wet clay on the rock and set to work. ‘Nobody will come this way,’ she said, ‘but I’ll just see if I can get finished before the church bells ring, but the judges won’t see it.’

So she worked and she worked and somebody must have helped her for she had just finished putting the last petal into place when the church bells rang out and she heard voices—it was Farmer’s cart with the judges in it and he had brought them round this way to the village so that the old woman might have a peep at them (he was a very kind man). They did more than take a peep. When they saw the rock and the spring and smelled the scent of the red rose petals they all said together it was beautiful. Then they went away.

In the evening they came back and some of the villagers too, and they gave the old woman the prize, three silver pennies.

‘You and your red rose petals,’ said the villagers, ‘if you could run about I’d say you’d walked eight miles to pick those roses. There isn’t a

single red rose in all Manor gardens today, not one, and the new squire is so angry that he went back to London after he'd given the judges lunch. He was so sure he was going to win the three silver pennies with all his great gardens against our little bits. I'm glad you got it, living all alone as you do.'

The old woman just smiled at them and the farmer drove off with them. Then she went indoors again—she looked at the firelight, the steaming porridge, the cakes baking on the hearth, the pile of turves and her neatly made bed. The floor had been swept. She put her three silver pennies on the window seat and sat down to her supper.

'How lucky I am,' she said at last. 'Here I sit with Food and Fire and Company. Thank you kindly, whoever you are.'

Told in 1962 by a Tissington W.I. member.

NOTES An unusual story, since the hob did not take affront at human thanks, like most of his kind.

It is pleasing to find that a folk-tale about traditional 'well-dressing' is still perpetuated and remembered.

13

The Wounded Swan

Cambridgeshire

On one of the fens the wild-fowl left the water to the swans. There were hundreds of them. Nobody took their eggs or shot at them. They were afraid.

There were Seven Swans they were afraid of. If you heard them flying over or, worse still, caught sight of them, you ran home and kept awake all night behind barred doors and didn't open to anyone.

There was a young fowler who was bold and as good a shot as Robin Hood. The people were starving and no fowler dared touch a swan, so he lay in wait for the Seven Swans and shot one of them in the wing. When he went to pick up the wounded bird the other six attacked and he had to fight them off with an iron knife. He would have been drowned if his boat

hadn’t drifted aground and the wounded swan in it. He took it to his hut and bound up its wing. He was scared at the blood so I suppose he daren’t kill it, but when it turned into a pale maiden he refused to be daunted and took her for his wife. But every night the six swans flew round his hut and beat on the door and every night he laughed at them. Anyone who laid hands on a King’s Swan was hanged, but his wife wasn’t a King’s Swan—she was one of the Seven Swans and even while he laughed he began to be afraid.

He kept her seven days and then her wounded arm healed. She grew feathers on it and he was terrified. Then she turned into a great hissing swan and came at him. He was so afraid of the blows from her sweeping wings that he ran outside the hut. The six swans were there and they flew out with him into the very middle of the fen and held him down and drowned him.

Then the seventh swan joined them and they flew round the fen seven times and no one ever saw the Seven Swans again—but no wild-fowl ever went there. It was always empty.

Told at a Cambridge W.I. group meeting in 1963, and taken down in shorthand for me as it was told.

NOTES This tale shows the ancient fear of iron attributed to uncanny beings, and also refers to their loss of power with blood-letting. It is probably of Norse origin, but fenland tales have a unique quality of their own. I was told that the fen mentioned in the tale was drained long ago.

14

Silly Kit and Down-a-down

Huntingdonshire

Silly Kit sat on a turf bank in the sun and was happy. Then some children came by and teased her,

Silly Kit
Addle-wit
Lost her wits

In Down-a-down.

And when they had made her cry they ran away. Poor Silly Kit dried her pretty blue eyes on her long silky golden hair and forgot them.

Then an old witch came by awl saw her sitting there so pretty in the sunshine and wanted to ill-wish her, so she put her wicked hand on Silly Kit's golden head and Silly Kit didn't like it but she had good kind manners and sat still. Then the witch saw she couldn't hurt her cruelly but only set up a little mischief, so she said,

Poor Silly Kit
Find your wits
Look for wits in Down-a-down.

And she went away.

'That's what I'll do, too,' said poor Silly Kit. 'If! don't forget on the way.' Off she went following her nose and met some deer who said, 'Don't go to Down-a-down, Silly Kit.'

'Was that where I was going?' said she.

'Go to church first,' said they.

'They won't let me in,' said poor Silly Kit. 'I can't make a crisscross—I forget how.'

'You haven't forgotten what to call it,' said they. 'We'll carry you there so that you can see it carved on the church wall.' And they left her near. She ran and knocked at the door but the Sacristan frowned when he saw her. 'I can make a criss-cross now,' pleaded poor Silly Kit but when she tried she couldn't remember how and he shut the door on her.

Then she cried again and went following her nose and looking for Down-a-down, and sometimes she remembered what she wanted and most times she didn't, but she came to Down-a-down under the hawthorn tree and knocked. 'Who knocks?' they said. 'I lost my wits in Down-a-down,' said Silly Kit. 'My mother left me under the hawthorn tree with a criss-cross to take care of me.'

They didn't like that at all, especially the word 'criss-cross'.

'But I can't remember how to make it since I lost my wits in Down-a-down. Will you give them back to me?' she said crying. The Elfin King laughed, 'She's only got half a soul but she can cry. We'll send her to Hell Mouth to pay the Devil for our seven years' due.'

So they didn’t open the fairy knowe but called out, ‘Go to Hell Mouth and tell him you’ve come in payment.’

‘I haven’t any money,’ said poor Silly Kit.

‘He won’t mind that,’ the Elfin King called.

So off went poor Silly Kit feeling so sadly that at last she tried to remember, and she knelt and tried to make a criss-cross of twigs on the road but she couldn’t get it right and she cried again.

And then Our Lord came by and she looked up at Him sobbing. ‘I can’t make a criss-cross, oh do show me how!’

And He did.

Then she smiled up at Him so prettily and said, ‘I’m a-looking for my wits in Hell Mouth, but I’m a-feared to go. Please come with me.’

And He took her hand in His and they went along together. There were daisies in the grass and Silly Kit knelt and picked them and made a daisy chain and danced in the sun and Our Lord waited.

‘Oh dear, I forget again,’ she said. ‘We’re going to Hell Mouth, aren’t we?’

‘We are,’ said Our Lord.

‘To find my poor wits and my lost soul? Must we go right inside? I’m a-feared.’

‘I have been there before,’ said Our Lord.

So she held His hand and wasn’t a bit frightened after all. Nobody stopped them—the Devil and all the fiends ran away and hid and they came back to green fields and sunshine.

And then she knew Him.

She knelt at Our Lord’s feet and then after a bit He went away.

By and by the children came by and sang to her,

> Dear pretty Kit,
> Has a soul today,
> She can come into
> Our Church and pray.

And they took her with them and when the Sacristan came he looked twice at her and once at her daisy chain. ‘Flowers of Paradise,’ he said.

‘I can make a criss-cross now,’ said pretty Kit and she tried to make it but she couldn’t get it right until she was helped by the children. ‘She did it! She did it!’ they cried. ‘Let her come inside now.’

And the Sacristan said, ‘Welcome God’s Innocent’ and he let poor pretty Kit and her daisy-chain go into God’s House.

A Huntingdon legend, told to my aunt, Mrs John Tongue, whose husband was a Norfolk rector, before 1914.

NOTES This is a fascinating mediaeval mixture of folk beliefs and monastic parable for the feeble-minded. The fool in folk-tales is often the luckbringer, and many times the hero. The insane were regarded by the Church as in special need of care and tenderness and defence against evil spirits. In many areas they were known as God’s Innocents, and they are still so called in remote areas by the elderly.

15

Silken Janet (or Mucketty Meg)

Lancashire/Cumberland

Blue eye beauty,
Brown eye bonny,
Grey eye grumpy,
Green eye greedy,
Black eye pick the pie,
Lie in bed and tell a lie.

(Song—Wessex version)

There was a pretty lass they called Jane but she was proud and greedy and very poor. She thought her looks made a lady of her and she wouldn’t lift a finger to sweep or dust or clean herself, or help on the farm, or mind the sheep.

She said they were dirty and when they answered her, ‘Dirty beast,’ she didn’t like it.

She wouldn’t milk the cows; she said they were mucky and when they answered her, ‘Mucky Minny,’ she didn’t like that either.

As for the pigs, she said they smelt and when they answered, ‘Stinking slut,’ she liked it no better.

One day she stole some silk from a ladies’ bower on the fairy knowe and made herself a fine gown over her old rags, but she didn’t wash. Then

she went to walk on the fairy knowe and when they saw her on *their* land in all her dirt and stolen finery, they had a mind to punish her. So all the beasts began to call out at her,

Silken Janet she wears a fine gown,
She stole it, she stole it from Down-a-down.
She never paid a penny
Because she hadn't any.

They made such a racket that people heard and they caught Silken Janet and were going to take away her silk dress but it was so dirty they said she should be hanged in it. Then she cried out to the beasts to help her but they all answered,

Nobody likes a grimy lass,
Nobody wants a slut, a slut,
Nobody needs a dirty beast,
Go away and roll in the muck.

Well, she couldn't anyway, even if she wanted to.

Then she cried out to the lads, 'Will not you help a pretty lass?' but they answered her,

Nobody likes a grimy lass,
Nobody needs a slut, a slut,
Nobody wants a dirty beast,
Go away and roll in the muck.

And she couldn't anyway and the hangman got the rope round her neck, and then she saw a fine gentleman in green and called out to him, 'Will you not save a pretty lass?'

And he said, 'Leave it to me, but you must pay me your two blue eyes.'

'What will I see with?' she begged.

'Green ones,' said he and took away her blue ones and left her with green. Well she cried but the rope was still there. 'I'll give you my fine golden gown,' she said.

'It's stolen! I'll not touch it. I want real gold,' he said.

'I have none!' she cried.

‘There‘s all your pretty gold hair under the dirt ; I‘ll take that,‘ and he cut it all off. ‘Now go and wash it in the river.‘ And she got out of the and the crowd and ran down to the river so fast she fell in.

When she climbed out she had lost the tresses of hair so she sat and cried. But nobody came to hang her and when she looked down the golden gown had been washed off her and her rags were clean as a gowan.

Then the came by : ‘Good clean lass,‘ said he.

Then a sheep came by : ‘Pretty, clean, curly locks,‘ said she. And she put up her hand to her short hair and it was lint-fair and curly.

Then a cow came by with a pail on her horns : ‘I’ll let you milk me, my clean, pretty lass,‘ she said. ‘There‘s a crowd looking for a dirty, golden slut that was to be hanged and I don‘t want them to have my milk.‘

So she set to milking, and she did it quite well. And when the crowd came by she kept her face hid against the cow. But the gentleman in green took her by the hair and looked at her. ‘This is a clean lass !’ he said; ‘she‘s got a lint-white, linen gown and curly, lint-white locks. But she‘s got *green eyes.*’ They were so disappointed they threw her into the river again.

When she climbed out this time she couldn‘t see any crowd or any gallows or any gentleman in green. She was all in her washed rags and her long golden hair hung down to dry about her and she was on the fairy knowe.

‘I best be out of here,‘ she said and ran for home. She ran till her dry rags fluttered in the wind and her golden hair streamed out around her and she met a young farmer.

‘Good morning, blue eyes,’ he said. ‘I‘m looking for a clean, pretty wife to work all her days. Will you marry me?‘

‘That I will gladly,’ said Silken Janet.

From a Lancashirefriend, 1938. She was an evacueefrom the City. Her grandparents werefrom Cumberland and Westmorland on her mother’s side, and from Durham and Northumberland on thefather’s, but she herself was born in Lancashire and married a Lancastrian.

NOTES A north-country W.I. member said her mother used to chant to a grubby child, ‘Go away and roll in the muck like Mucketty Meg.’

The fairy folk are said to hate sluttish ways and any dishonesty to them. In this tale there is a mixture of the Ballad of the Pricketty Bush and a fairy cure for the dirty. See *Somerset Folk Lore: Pixy Lore,* ‘To Please the Pisgies’ (published by the Folk Lore Society, 1954).

A *gowan* is a daisy.

Four

Wood and Water

16 The Mermaid and the Trawlermen
17 The Great Big Fish
18 Bubbling Well and Black Tarn
19 Red, Red Rags
20 Have a Mind to Misbourne

16

The Mermaid and the Trawlermen

Norfolk

My grandfather was a very grumpy old man and I wasn't very fond of him, but sometimes he'd get in the mood to tell tales and all of us came in to listen. Sometimes when he was getting drunk he'd begun and then there would only be me—the others were all afraid of him but he liked me to listen—but if I asked about the tale over again he was angry with me. He thought it was bad luck.

One night, all of a sudden, he started telling this tale about a mermaid.

My uncles all got up and went out. They are fishermen and it's terribly unlucky to speak of them, so there was nobody to listen but me, but he

went on just the same.

He was on his trawler and his owner was on another, and the two sailed right up north, round Scotland.

He said the fishing was good but the seas were dangerous.

Then the seas got worse and the fishing got much better and my grandfather was afraid of it. The owner just laughed at him, but neither of the crews did. They were worried that bad luck would come. Something was luting them on with all this wonderful fishing.

Then the men on the first trawler saw a mermaid, sitting on the deck of a drifting wreck. They all tried not to look but they couldn't help it, and she had long, green hair like seaweed.

My grandfather, he had his case-knife handy and he called to his crew to keep a hand on theirs and turn and make sail for harbour as quick as they could but the other craft didn't, the owner couldn't take his eyes off the mermaid and kept sailing closer.

Grandad's trawler was only just in time. A huge storm blew up but they weathered it and by the time they ran into harbour they'd lost most of their catch.

The owner's trawler and the crew were never heard of again. Gran-dad reckoned they sank when they ran into the wreck, but when I asked later on —weeks after—he took his belt to me.

From a demobbed sailor, 1940s.

17

The Great Big Fish

Cornwall

A little fisherboy ran up the shore calling:
'Mother, O Mother! I've a fish!'
'What are you telling me now! You'd be needing a line and hook.'
'Mother, O Mother! I had a great long line and a great big, bent pin.'

‘What are you telling me now! And what would you catch with your big, bent pin?’
‘Mother, O Mother! I caught a great big fish with my great big, bent pin.’
‘What are you telling me now! And what was the size of your great big fish?’
‘Mother, O Mother! He was as big as my father’s fishing boat.’
‘What are you telling me now! And didn’t he pull you right off the quayside?’
‘Mother, O Mother! That’s just what he did!’
‘What are you telling me now! Then how did you land him?’
‘Mother, O Mother! That’s just what I didn’t—he ate me?’

What day of the month was it?
The first of April.

From a letter to a friend of minefrom Cornwall, 1930s. It was sent on to me but was destroyed in my fire, and no details were left. Perhaps it was afragment of a ‘Jack Pudding’ play for April 1st.

18

Bubbling Well and Black Tarn

Northumberland

There was once near where I live a very wicked warlock and the people were horribly afraid of him. Our people were shepherds who lived near the coast. There were forests inland with wolves there, but our valley was sheltered and a stream ran right through it, and then fell over the cliffs down to the shore, and the sheep were well fed and safe. Then the warlock saw how happy they were and he made a mound with his castle on it right across the clear stream, that made the water muddy and bad and it spread out into a big, black pool where no beasts would drink. Then the warlock used to ride out on a dragon demon-horse, a nonesuch, and harry the flocks, driving them to the forest for the wolves, but my people took to the hills instead. There was no water up there and he thought they’d all die of

thirst, but there is a spring up there called the Bubbling Well, but I wouldn't show it to you. When the warlock thought they were all dead he looked through his magic stone ring and there they all were, well and happy. He was very angry and he rode his nonesuch up to Bubbling Well and trampled it into mire, then he rode back to his castle in the middle of Black Tarn, but the shepherds came and cleaned Bubbling Well and soon it was singing again, and clear and cold. Some time after, the warlock looked through his magic ring again and this time he saw a crippled knight on a good grey galloway get down from the saddle. The galloway stood by a turf bank for him, for he hadn't any feet or hands—he was a leper. Then he crawled on his stumps to the healing water and drank and bathed his wounds. The warlock rode up on his nonesuch and ran him through with his iron sword and the nonesuch trampled over his body and kicked it into Bubbling Well.

When the grey galloway saw this, he screamed with fury and left his grazing and attacked the nonesuch with teeth and heels and the warlock had a job to keep his seat; the nonesuch had never met an angry stallion. It ran away with the warlock all the way to the castle.

Then the crippled knight climbed out of Bubbling Well and he had lost his leprosy and got back his hands and feet. He patted and made much of his great war horse, then he mounted again and rode away to get armour to come back and fight the warlock.

He had to go a very long way. The warlock saw him going when he looked through his stone ring, and the next time he used it to make sure he had really gone.

There was an old witch at Bubbling Well, a bad old creature, but he was a worse, so he rode up on his nonesuch and killed her then and there. He wasn't having any other wicked creature on his land. Then he tossed the witch's corpse into Bubbling Well and went home slowly, for he and the nonesuch were still suffering from the wounds the grey galloway gave them. But the water of the well rose and poured down the hill after them, taking the witch's body. It came swirling and bobbing after them and when they reached Black Tarn it came too; then the floods covered the castle and the warlock and the nonesuch, and the Tarn rose till it rushed over the cliff edge and carried the three bodies right out to sea; then the stream shrank again and ran away to sea down a wide, rocky gully.

The Black Tarn is still there but it’s quite small and it never has any fish, and wild ducks never swim on it.

My people know where Bubbling Well is, but they don’t want it disturbed so they don’t tell—nor shall I.

From a Northumbrian nurse at Gray’s Inn Hospital, London, 1927.

I also heard of the tale under its present title in 1936, but could not trace it. I think it was originally a ballad.

NOTES There is a literary flavour to this tale which might well derive from a mediaeval romance, but it contains well-known traditional motifs in the holed stone and the magic healing well.

19

Red, Red Rags

Hampshire (Isle of Wight)

There was a lady with a family of young children. The father was at the wars and one little boy was too bold.

He wanted to be an ‘owler’ [Sussex word for smuggler] so he hid himself aboard a lugger and he went all the way to France for a cargo and was mighty sick too. Then, when they was coming back, the preventative cutter exchanged shots with them and a ball hit him. His luck was clean out, and when they heard him cry out and found him he was bleeding badly.

It’s bad luck to show any blood on a lugger with a coastguard too close on your heels. So they rowed him ashore, bandages and all, and left him on the beach and took off quick with their cargo and the coastguards still on their heels. They got where they could dump the cargo overboard, and then let the coastguards catch them up.

Of course they didn’t find anything, not even a drop of blood, but the ‘owlers’ daren’t go back for the little boy. They had laid him behind some rocks on a beach about a mile from his own home, but it was patrolled at times so they couldn’t do it.

The shots had been heard, and they thought he’d bleed to death there with no one to save him, or the Riding Officers would get him and what

would his poor mother do.

Now there was an old woman took her donkey down shore to collect seaweed and she was an ‘owler’s’ mother and she got there before the Riding Officer and found the boy.

She put the little fellow in a pannier and covered him with seaweed, and picked up the bloody, soaked rags quickly and made off up the cliff to a fairy well where people wished and left red rags on the tree branches there, and she tore the bandages into bits and left them hanging there too.

Then she met one of the mother’s servants searching for him (the little boy) and he carried him home quick, and when the Riding Officer stopped her to search her panniers he got a load of wet seaweed for his pains.

A Napoleonic smugglers’ tale told to me by D. Barnett, a market-gardener of Dorset. She heard it in the 1920sfrom her uncle, an old man who came from the island.

NOTES There are still some springs and wells to be found in south-western England where rags are hung to flutter from the surrounding bushes. It is thought luckiest to use red ones.

20

Have a Mind to Misbourne

Buckinghamshire

I was riding through a beech hanger above Great Missenden when I met my old friend, Mrs Lee, with her basket, which may have carried laces but more likely pheasant eggs. I was pretty sure of this. She was so instantly affable and adroit at keeping the basket away from the pony’s sides.

‘Be you riding down by Misbourne, Miss?’ she asked. I had been and the little river was unusually full. Her eyes were anxious and frightened. Then she said, ‘We’re all on the road west—there’s danger all round us. I know. It will come over from the east, that’s what Misbourne is saying.’

I knew there were vague tales of the erratic and prophetic flow of the river, so, as I wanted to hear more, I let her frightened tongue run on. ‘Misbourne always knows when the black luck is on the land. That’s when she gushes out and now she’s almost in flood. ‘Tis very bad, that. The floods will soon be out. ‘Tis a terrible warning. They was out when the

Great Sickness emptied all the land and London burned to hot ashes and I remember when King Edward died there was a great war in less than seven years. Have a mind to Misbourne, she tells great sorrows to England. It's coming surely—yes, 'tis on the way.' And she slipped away through the beech trees, really scared.

I went home interested and wondering a little uneasily.

Personal; told to me in 1939 by Mrs Lee, a member of the gipyfamily.

NOTES The Great Sickness was the Plague of London, 166s. It had reached the Chiltern Hills, and the Fire of London was the next year. In 1914, four years after the death of King Edward VII, came the First World War—there were other vague memories of Misbourne in flood and national disaster. My old gipsy friend had been frankly terrified—she had not stayed longer than to give warning.

It was needed.

As I rode home after a long day and stabled the tired pony, the sirens began their first eerie, dreary, warning wail—the Blitz had begun.

Five

Ghosts and Evil Spirits

21 The Hare and the Harbourer (two versions)
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21

The Hare and the Harbourer

Herefordshire/Monmouthshire

Version 1

There was a harbourer lived in a snug little cottage next to the forest; he had a neat little garden plot and the river ran just beyond it but people never came to visit. As he was always busy he didn’t mind—so that was all right then.

The neighbours never went into the wood, not even to fetch firing, but he did as he went about his journeys after the deer and he came out safe and sound—so that was all right then.

The neighbours were afraid of the river too and they taught their children to sing:

Nicky Nicky Nye
Pulls you down
Underneath the water,
Drown, drown, die.

which frightened them so much they kept away from all the ditches and ponds as well and only got fresh water with rain and dew. But the harbourer never minded the green, wicked, watching eyes of Nicky Nicky Nye. There was a wishing-well in his garden plot and he got his fresh water from that—besides that, he had his dogs and *one dog* no one said much about—so that was all right then.

But one day at the inn the new landlord said, 'Where's that spannel of yours I hear about then? The others is lying at your feet—do you always leave him to guard house?'

'*She* wouldn't come away from it,' said the harbourer; 'she's a special bitch with a special job—mind that. Special.' And he got up and went his way.

Then everyone talked—oh, very brave all together they were!

'He needs a spayed bitch to guard him and his house from the evil spirits.'

"Tis too ugly herself she is for a luck dog!'

'And too ugly-tempered to strangers,' said those who liked stolen venison or to go prying, and had found a welcome on the wrong side.

So they all joined in saying the large white and gold spannel was not a real dog at all (except those whose breeches she had tasted for them). But they left the cottage alone.

It suited the harbourer. No one tried stealing from his garden—*she* was there and no one came after his deer—*she* was there too. Sometimes she was seen, sometimes she wasn't, but *he* could always see her and he didn't about her looks.

One moony night, to his surprise, a farmer hailed him across the river. 'I glimpsed your spayed bitch as I came and I take that for a sign my ill-luck has changed. I'm in a bad way and need her kind of help if only she'd come. My cows is being milked dry and bleeding and no one dare say who is ill-wishing them. Would she come?'

‘She might at that,’ said the harbourer and he crossed the bridge to the farmer and they walked back to the farm in the moonlight. The farmer couldn’t see, and the harbourer took care not to look but they both heard the pad of a dog’s feet. So they took care not to speak a word, all night.

At midnight, something huge and with glowing eyes came hop-hopping along to the poor, uneasy cows. The farmer nearly cried out but the harbourer stopped him in time for they could see it was a monstrous hare.

When it saw them standing silent it stopped—*then it came hopping on at them*, but there was a growl from a dog, then a squeal from the hare, and then a scream in an old woman’s voice, and they saw the spayed bitch seize the hare and drag it by the throat to the river and fling it in with a splash.

There was another splash as Nicky Nicky Nye grabbed it down and the witch-hare screamed in Old Kezzy’s voice and the farmer turned and ran for home as hard as he could pelt.

He never saw the spayed bitch go away, nor did the harbourer, but there she was waiting for him at his cottage door, wagging her tail. So that was all right then, wasn’t it?

From a Welsh W.I. member, Denman College, 1962.

NOTES These witchcraft stories are common in many of the Celtic areas in England, Ireland, and the Highlands of Scotland.

Shropshire/Hampshire

Version 2

There was a harbourer that had a comfortable cottage all to himself and he wanted a wife to share it.

To be sure it stood in a haunted wood and a fast river ran in front of it in which Nicky Nicky Nye lurked, so it wasn’t any surprise no one visited him except White Mary, who was a mile away all on her own too—but she was a ‘healer’ and a wise woman and old at that, so she did pretty well; but though he was sensible and courageous and knew exactly what to do, and had the proper kind of help, he dreamed of curls and blue

So off he goes to find them and he stops to tell White Mary his intentions.

My dear soul! She knew all about it—looks at him with her piercing eyes and says never a word but ‘Even the wisest don’t always think when they’re well off.’

The harbourer says something about pretty as a May Day dawn and White Mary says, ‘Tell me that when she’s ten years wed,’ but she couldn’t daunt him and she saw it. ‘Bring your yellow curls and blue eyes to see me,’ she says, ‘then maybe if she hasn’t an empty head and can do with a bit of luck—anyways *you’ll* be in need of it. Where’s the spannel then? Left it behind to guard your wits as well as your cottage?’

But even that didn’t daunt him, though he never liked anyone to speak of his spayed bitch, which very, very few but the ‘gifted’ ever saw but everyone whispered about, and White Mary felt very sorry she’d vexed him. Still, she knew she had to warn him and goes on, “Tis in my mind. *They’ve* [the elfin, or fair, folk] put this folly into yours. Oh yes, to be sure—the cottage will be safe with the spannel around and you’ll come back a wiser man than before and so you’ll be as safe as you ever was—but what about an empty head, even if it’s got yellow curls like a daffodil and big blue eyes?’

But he was vexed at her so she let him go on his way hoping she hadn’t spoken out in vain.

Well to be sure her words went with him, so she hadn’t.

By and by he come down a hill and below, washing linen in the river,

he saw the prettiest maid he had ever seen except in his dreams. He called out in delight to a farmer working at rebuilding a stone wall.

‘Tell me—who is that lovely lass with the blue eyes and the yellow curls?’

‘Oh, is she about then?’ says the farmer. ‘What mischief is she at now?’

‘She’s linen in the river.’

‘And a-listening and watching with those big, innocent eyes she has!’

‘Lovely eyes,’ say the harbourer, but the farmer scowls and bangs a stone into place.

‘What’s her name and has she a mother?’

‘She has so,’ says the farmer and very grim he was, ‘and she’s known as Lizzie’s Luck and there’s not a man in the countryside would marry her.’

‘I would,’ said the harbourer.

‘Wait until I tell you what you’ll get with a lass that thinks her looks give her the right to give herself the airs of a born countess, and ruin those

about her. Her mother had a nice farm but it wasn't good enough for her, so she sold it unbeknown while her mother was working in the fields and now they live in an old cowshed. Her mother had ten good cows, but they weren't good enough for a girl with her curls and blue eyes. She sold them too—but I was there to buy them, and all the pigs and sheep and poultry—I was by then.'

'And now you'd wish to get the mother, too.'

'I would so,' shouted the farmer, 'and give the poor woman comfort and happiness. She'd marry me in a winking if that useless hussy were gone—but who'd rid us of her?'

'I would,' said the harbourer, 'and turn her into a good wife in two or three years, for even you must admit she's wonderful pretty.'

Then the farmer had a good look at him. 'Ah, I've heard of you,' he says, 'live up country not far from White Mary, where no one else could. Not but what you are helped,' he went on carefully. 'A proper nice looking man like you might be the finish of her whimsies.'

'Then I'll wed her,' says the harbourer, 'for you must admit she's wonderful pretty.'

'Handsome is as handsome does,' says the farmer.

'Look at her now, idling and sidling closer to listen to talk that shouldn't concern her and letting all her mother's washing float away down stream for her poor mother to run all down two fields and wade in and rescue.'

'Not this time,' said the harbourer and he went to where she was standing smiling sideways at him and she *was* wonderful pretty too. 'Your mother's washing is in the water,' he says, 'I'll help you get it out.' And he picks her up, which she very well liked, and tosses her right into the deepest pool among the washing.

'Now you needn't mind getting wet,' he says, 'and wash a lot of whimsies away too. You don't need them where you're going. I'm taking you to be my wife—we'll see your mother and the priest first,' and off he takes her with the farmer all after.

And when the harbourer saw her tired, worried mother, he wouldn't stay for a minute longer—that mother had been wonderful pretty once and now with the little hussy safely married to him and out of mischief he'd leave it to the farmer to bring the smiles to her face again.

So off to church the four of 'em went, and three of them glad to go— as to the fourth she hadn't had time to change her mind or her wet frock—and

he was a real man, and his hair was raven black, and his eyes blue and a bit frightening, and she'd never get another chance like this. So they left the priest and the other happy pair and after her husband kissed her she was happy too—and she *was* wonderfully pretty.

He found her easy to kiss and she had to own she was enjoying herself, but being the contrary little fool she was she starts to get uppish. The harbourer just takes a careful look along his ash-stick and puts it down once more and she looks at her drying frock and remembers getting in the washing and takes another think.

It lasted nearly a mile but a great farm dog rushes out at her barking. She yells to her husband to use the stick quick but he just stands quiet, and speaks quiet to the dog and it goes away friendly and quiet.

Well, she doesn't think much of that: 'You didn't even hit it,' she grumbles. 'Your new father gave the stick to me,' says he, 'but he didn't mean it to be used on dogs.'

She didn't like the sound of that. 'I'm going back home!' she says with a stamp.

'And where's that I' says he.

'To my mother, so I will!'

'Oh no, you won't,' says he, 'you can't. She's living in Farmer's home now—and he won't give you a welcome.'

She liked the sound of that still less. 'I want to go and get all my clothes,' she stamped.

'Your mother gave you the one you'be got on—all the rest were hers. Now she'll be glad to get her own back.'

So there she was—one eye on her husband and one on the farmer's wedding present and only one draggled gown to her name, so she went into a howling rantum-tantrum outside White Mary's house.

Then someone tossed a nosegay from the door and a voice said, 'Noisy temper, no brains, best pick up your luck quick.'

What does the fool do but spit and trample her nosegay to bits in the road. White Mary just closes the door as her husband takes the stick to her once, and if she yelled afore 'twas nothing to this time.

'He's learning,' says White Mary, 'and she'll have to learn the hard way now.'

They were nearly home when he stops and looks at her dragging and snivelling and sulking behind him: 'We're nearly home,' he says, 'and if

you'd behaved on the way you'd know by now what's to be done where you're going, and to keep a civil, quiet tongue *whatever* you may see—and *don't alter anything anywhere.* That's a good lass.'

Well, she liked her kiss, but she wasn't going to do what he told her—she was the bride. But somehow she didn't come out with it till they were over the bridge safe into the garden. Then she ran down to the river because he'd drawn her away and says to show him, 'I'll do my washing here.'

But he picks her up and takes her right to the edge and says, 'You can if you want Nicky Nicky Nye to help you since you have let him see you.'

And when she sees Nicky's two green eyes watching her deep down below the foam she gives a yell and hangs on to her dear husband and a big white and gold spannel comes running out of the cottage to help her, but she kicks out at it and yells, 'Be off, you dirty beast!' And all in a second it wasn't there any more.

That scared her and when she looked at her husband's grim white face it scared her still more. 'You've thrown away your luck—but you shan't ruin *mine,* you've clamoured about all you've seen, and lost a good friend for me, and you've shown yourself and your fear to Nicky Nicky Nye. We'll try a dose of Farmer's ash-plant before you make more mischief.'

And she learned almost as fast as Farmer hoped, and behaved herself for a bit.

At the end of the week she caught a glimpse of the spannel run to her husband as he went into the wood. 'It's me it should be taking care of,' she whimpered, 'left all alone in the cottage for a whole day.' So she went into the garden and all round it were queer stones under the hedges and she thought they were so ugly she threw three of them right away into the wood before she remembered she mustn't alter anything and she was afraid—but she daren't seek for them or run away over the bridge with Nicky Nicky Nye watching underneath it and she did hope her husband wouldn't know.

But that night as they sat in the firelight with his three great hounds asleep at their feet, there came shrill laughter and dancing in the garden and the three great hounds whimpered in terror and their hair stood up, but something rose from beside her husband and he opened the barred door to it. Then the jeers turned to shrieks and there was a growl and a bark, and

silence again. Then something she couldn't see padded back into the room and the harbourer barred the door once more.

Then he reached for the ash-plant: 'What did you meddle with?' he said, and she just said, 'Only three stones.' She was beginning to learn about keeping silence so he let her off lightly—*but she* didn't think so for she blubbered, 'I can put three more back.'

'That won't help us now,' said he. 'Never go out to the garden unless it is bright sunlight—you'll be guarded if you really mean to be sensible.' And she did try, with one eye on the wedding present, and after a while she caught one or two glimpses of the spannel bitch leaning against her husband's knee and she didn't like it any better. 'Ugly old bitch,' she said to herself until she remembered the horrid laughter and was glad she hadn't spoken out loud. However she did mind while her husband was about, but there came a day when he had to be away till next morning and she cried bitterly. 'I'd ask White Mary to bide with you,' said the harbourer, 'but you stamped on her luck, and threw away her magic stones. You can't expect her to come. If you shutter all windows and stay downstairs tonight by a good fire, somebody will guard you if you don't speak at all.' And he kissed her and went away over the bridge.

Well, the sun was shining and she thought she'd fill the water-pail from their wishing-well but there was only a steady trickle of sweet water and she got tired of waiting. 'I'll make a nice, deep pool for the pail for me to dip in,' she says and she pulled up the stones round it and trampled the mossy basin, and then she looked up at a growl, and there's the yellow and white spannel, and she heaves a stone at her and hit her. 'Good job too, you ugly, spying beast,' she yells and drags the injured spannel into the wood-shed, and slams the bolt on her, and then—not till then, mind—does she remember what she wasn't to do.

Well, she'd altered the wishing-well and couldn't do much about that, but she still thought her looks might save her if her husband saw her curls decked in the seven red ribbons hanging on the ash tree above the wishing-well.

So she took them and very pretty she looked too, but she didn't feel very happy as it drew on to dusk, and then she daren't go out and loose the bolt from the shed—she'd left it too late.

She made a good fire but the thin, jeering laughter outside broke out suddenly and there were no dogs—ugly or not—to bark and drive them

away. And then there came a rapping and a scraping like great hands along the shutters and she yelled and ran upstairs—and of course the window was open and a great, twiggy hand came groping for her and she just stands and screams. Then someone outside spoke, and the jeering laughter stopped at once, and that horrible, branchy hand paused, and then someone outside unbolted the shed door and the spannel dashed out barking and worrying something and she fell in a faint.

At last she came to and heard the voice—a good voice—'Unbar the door and let us in or They'll come back.'

And she did and in walked White Mary with the spannel limping on three legs. White Mary barred the door and went and sat by the fire all night and never said a word.

Nor did the bride—she was learning fast and forgetting her curls, but when it was cock-crow White Mary looked at her and her red ribbons: 'Too late to mend matters by taking away more luck,' she said. 'You'll learn before you ruin him I hope. Now take a look what came out of the wood through the gap you made in my magic stones.' She daren't look at the queer footmarks. 'And now look what was set free to wander and get back its red ribbons.' And she saw there was no ash tree above the ruined wishing-well, but there was a great branch below the window all gnawed with dog's teeth.

'Here's a year's work for us both to make all safe again and no meddlers,' says White Mary to the spannel. 'She's learning fast but here comes her husband to teach her even faster.'

Over the bridge he came all in a hurry to be early but when he saw the ash-bough and the state of the wishing-well and the red ribbons in his wife's curls and the limping spannel, he didn't ask a single question but set about her with the ash-plant till she run crying to White Mary.

'She'll do now,' says White Mary, 'and when she can think about others she'll make you a nice little wife.'

And she went away, but later on she came again, and the spannel stayed around, and wasn't she glad the times she could see it and by and by it was most times, after the baby came. Then White Mary stood godmother after she'd filled the gaps in the stones in the wood, and rebuilt the wishing-well with mosses and herbs, and the sweet water was gushing out in its old spender spout and there was a little ash tree above it with seven red ribbons.

Yes, the harbourer was a happy man with a good loving wife and since the baby didn't give her time to play with her curls she played with his and his dad's black ones and looked than ever.

But Nicky Nicky Nye was still a-watch for all White Mary could do and one day the baby went crawling away down the garden path straight to the river. His mother saw and ran and so did the spannel, but before they could grab the baby a scaly wet arm whipped up out of the water's very edge and pulled him in.

There was two tremendous splashes.

She went in after the baby, deep, deep water and all, and grabs it and the spannel gets a good jawful of a wet, scaly arm and hangs on.

Then White Mary comes running over the bridge and the harbourer comes rushing out of the wood and they catch hold too and pull her and her baby safe into the garden again, but the spannel she doesn't let go.

Then Nicky Nicky Nye yells and wails—but the spannel doesn't let go. So he takes himself off a hundred mile down river and never comes back and the spannel has a long swim safe home.

When she comes in there's Her a-cuddling of the baby she saved, and Him a-kissing of her pretty curls and White Mary smiling—and they all see the white and gold spannel come and sit right alongside the wife's knee. White Mary smiles at her, 'You'll do now,' she said.

From a Hampshire New Forest gipsy, 1920s. Other versions from various tellers—Shropshire, 1905, and Somerset, 1920.

NOTES Like so many Welsh Border tales, it carries a wealth of old traditions, particularly those of the spayed bitch and the white and red-gold spaniel. 'Herla's Hounds', the Welsh Border fairy hounds, were white with red ears, and were a very ancient breed. They were like the Dartmoor 'Dandy Dogs' and the north-country 'Gabble Ratchets'. See John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, 1901.

22

Grim's Dyke

Middlesex

There was a rich, noble lady that had but one young daughter and she was very pretty and very wilful and very curious, so one day she wandered alone all along Grim's Dyke and into Grim's Wood, and she didn't come back. Then the noble lady went to the priest and said, 'I am going into Grim's Wood to bring my daughter back.' And the priest said, 'Don't go alone, whatever you do.' 'Let me alone for that,' said she, 'I will ride there on my milk-white jennet which is half a donkey.' 'Then you must leave the jennet at the wood edge,' said the priest. 'I will pray for you till you reach Grim's Wood, but don't go inside alone.'

'Then I will take my great boar-hound with an iron collar and a chain to guard me,' said she.

'Then be sure the collar is truly fast, and my prayers can enter the wood with you and protect you all.'

So she gave orders that the iron collar should be put on the great hound and well fastened and the jennet should be iron shod.

But the groom was lazy and dishonest and fastened the chain to the collar with a leather thong blacked over with a greasy hand and saved his fingers from being pinched and just tapped the loose shoes back into place and put the price of the new iron shoes into his own pocket.

Now the noble lady had a little lap-dog who watched this, and when the noble lady mounted at the upping-stock he jumped onto her lap and crept up her sleeve and she smiled and let him stay. 'You'll all need me,' he said, but nobody heard him.

So they went along Grim's Dyke and the jeunet lost a shoe.

'Here's mischief,' said the jennet, 'I have only one more [the shoeing of forefeet was not often done in Middlesex]. Be on your guard, hound l' 'I have an iron collar and chain,' said the hound, 'My lady will be safe.'

'And I am with you,' said the lap-dog in the sleeve, but nobody heard him.

After a bit the jeunet lost the other shoe and spoke to the lady, 'I cannot come into Grim's Wood with you. I am only half a donkey. I have no criss-cross on my back—but I will wait for you with the donkey half inside and you have the boar-hound.'

'And me,' said the lap-dog in the sleeve, but nobody heard.

So the noble lady stepped inside Grim's Wood and there was Grim in a cloak of flame waiting for her. The great boar-hound sprang at him but Grim struck him and burned him so cruelly he fell whimpering, for the

false leather thong was burnt through and the chain the lady was holding was parted from the collar. ‘Don’t let go of it,’ said the lap-dog and the lady heard, but Grim didn’t. She held tight to the iron, so then Grim said to her, ‘Let

‘I’ll not,’ said she.

Then he said, ‘What dare you seek here?’

‘My young daughter.’

‘She is not here’ (which was a lie), ‘but you are come. I’ll take you instead.’

But the great boar-hound still had on his iron collar and in spite of his pain he seized Grim by his hairy haunches and held on, and the jennet kicked out and knocked Grim right out of Grim’s Wood, boar-hound and all, and the lap-dog jumped down and nipped Grim’s tail and held on outside Grim’s Wood.

And now they had Grim.

‘I want my young daughter,’ said the lady. ‘You must give her back now. You told a lie, or we’ll take *you* with *us.’*

Grim yelled in fury and tried to free his tail but the lap-dog nipped again and his teeth were like needles, and the great boar-hound bit deeper and the jennet Iifted a back foot.

‘Why are you not afraid of me?’ Grim cried.

‘A mother’s love is stronger than the Devil,’ she said. ‘Give me my young daughter.’

Then he summoned up a pretty young girl who stood there until the lady gave her a hard blow on her ears. She still stood there, but the noble lady said, ‘That thing you have shown us has no soul—it cannot laugh or cry. Give me my daughter.’

And this time the lap-dog’s sharp teeth met in Grim’s tail.

So Grim called up the true daughter and when she saw her dear mother she ran to her and cried, and when she saw the lap-dog on the end of Grim’s tail she laughed till he let go.

So Grim went back into his wood in a cloud of smoke and the noble lady lifted her young daughter on to the jennet and the lap-dog ran on before and the great boar-hound limped behind and they came safe home.

But the lap-dog and the boar-hound couldn’t stop drinking to get the taste of brimstone out of their teeth and the thievish groom was hanged.

Heard on an Eleventh Harrow scout hike, about 1930.

NOTES This is a mixture of the Celtic ‘horse, hound and hawk’ tale of helpful beasts, with a lap-dog instead of a hawk. This tale gives it a later date, when lap-dogs were better known and became the favourites of rich ladies.

This Grim is also a Norse fiend in mediaeval trappings. It is quite a familiar tale of the rescue of a soul from Hell, but with the very early magic of iron included.

23

Whistling Jimmy

Surrey

Some years ago we moved into a bungalow on a new estate and every night after dark someone walked right by our windows whistling.

We never saw him though we tried to catch him, and sometimes we could hear his boots—they clumped, and he’d come right past our windows over our flower-beds.

We lived in a close and we asked the neighbours to watch out for him but they never saw him either; and then somebody said, ‘There aren’t any *footprints* on the flower-beds!’ and someone else said, ‘ *You can’t hear heavy boots on soft earth.’*

And that did it!

We all heard him whistling at night and we got scared, even my husband didn’t laugh at me. So he made some enquiries and in the end an old country-man said, ‘Did you know the village well was where your houses are? It was filled in. That’s where Old Jim the cowman came for clean water every night all his life. He always whistled to keep himself safe, and we all called him Whistling Jimmy.’

Told to mein 1965 by a member of Taunton Young Wives’ Club, who had heard the tale in Surrey in 1950.

NOTES Many country people believe that to sing or whistle after dusk keeps away evil spirits (also footpads!). An opposite belief is also held, particularly in East Anglia.

24

Twopenny Priss

Worcestershire

There was a handsome girl whose mother kept telling her that if she wanted to get on in the world she must remember her manners.

The silly creature tossed her head. She was not going to trouble about that. But when she found no one would have her, she changed her mind enough to marry a higgler who had a blackthorn handy to teach her how to speak civilly to customers.

But he never cured her and she went and had a daughter just as uncivil.

In the end the higgler was glad enough to die of a fever and be well rid of them both.

So then she married a well-to-do farmer and a fine life she and her girl led him too—but she *was* going up in the world though their manners were not keeping step.

They had frills and finery, but they screamed and gabbled like geese.

The farmer at last grew sad and tired and ashamed and he decided on a move, but as he spent a lot of time with his men he asked their advice.

‘I’m thinking of taking Hullet Farm,’ he said.

‘’Tis a good farm, master,’ they agreed.

‘So I hear,’ said the farmer.

‘But it has a queer name indoors,’ said they.

‘We won’t be living indoors.’

‘The Miss and Missus will.’

‘That’s what I mean.’

So to Hullet Farm they all went and since the farmer worked outside and his wife and her daughter lazed about inside things might have gone better, but there was one room where the door opened all by itself and it was kept nailed up and nothing would suit Miss and Missus but to have it unnailed and have it for their own grand parlour like his lordship’s lady at the great hall.

One day Miss was at her needlework when the door creaked and swung open a little. ‘Come in whoever you are and be dratted,’ she out and in It

came.

When she looked up because of the cold mist she gave such a scream that the hens all ran squarking to roost on the barn rafters for safety, but It just tossed her right through the open window down into the new-turned potato beds.

When they dug her out she started running and she didn't stop till she met a gipsy and he looking at her furbelows, thought he was on to a good thing, and got her to run away to London with him.

He kept a blackthorn stick handy too.

Well, her mother went pining and whining and driving everybody crazy with her temper till she decided to go and sit in the parlour.

The door creaked and swung open a little. 'Drat you, fool! Come on in and hurry up about it.' And in It came.

Well, *she* gave a yell that frightened the pig into a fit, and she ran with It after her. She ran right upstairs to the attics screaming like a gleanie but It caught up with her and tossed her out of the attic window and she broke her neck.

Well, they gave her a decent funeral, but it wasn't long till Farmer got back his old, kindly ways and the menfolk whistled about their work, and Twopenny Priss sang as she cooked and scrubbed and polished and swept.

Twopenny Priss had been the farm maid for ten years. She came from the Parish Oparaers when she was just large enough to fetch and carry and be useful, and in all the time she got to do all the work Missus had never paid her more than twopence a year, and that wasn't going to buy her a husband.

She was homely and wholesome with a kind face you could warm your heart at, and a tongue as kind as her face, and she thought it a sad thing the parlour should be unswept and dusty.

The farm men warned her.

'There's something bad there—an unquiet spirit,' they said.

'The poor lonely thing,' said Twopenny Priss, 'and not a Christian soul to help it.'

'Remember what happened to Miss and Missus.'

'I'll take my Bible and say my prayers for me and It,' says Priss. And in she went with her Bible and her broom and by and by the door creaked and swung open slowly.

‘Come in and welcome in God’s name,’ called Twopenny Priss and in It came.

The mist was bitter cold, but Twopenny Priss took her little Bible out of her apron pocket and spoke out bravely: ‘In the name of the Lord, why troublest thou me?’

Then the mist went and there stood the ghost of the old miser that had owned the farm years back, and died all alone and nobody knows what he had done with his money. The ghost beckoned and said, ‘Come,’ and Priss followed.

Then he stood by the great hearth-stone and pointed down. ‘So your gold is there, is it?’ said Priss. ‘You poor unhappy soul, it weighs too heavy for you to get away and you can’t take it with you, can you?’ Then the ghost said, ‘Lift!’ and Twopenny Priss slid the stone away. Underneath was a small, black chest and some bags of money. Then the ghost cried out in a glad voice, ‘Free at last!’ and went away for ever.

Twopenny Priss ran to fetch her master and when he saw all the wealth he said, ‘Here’s a fine dowry for you, Priss!’ But Priss said sadly, ‘I’m too homely for a husband. Who’d want to marry me?’ ‘Bless your kind, loving heart,’ said the farmer. ‘I would and I will tomorrow.’ And he did.

A Worcestershire ghost story told to me by my mother in her seventies (1940), when recalling her childhood in Shropshire. It was told to her in 1878, and her great-grandmother, who was born in 1780, heard it in about 1800, so the tale must be well over 170 years old.

NOTES A *gleanie* is a guinea-fowl.

25

Drowning Jerusalem

Lincolnshire

You know there is a green path on one of our hills like a maze, called Jerusalem. I’ve heard that when people had to go to Jerusalem for a penance they went there instead. Well, it was nearer home and saved them a long journey. They used to say there was a river spirit called Gur (Aegir). He didn’t want Jerusalem and Christians beside his river so he brought a

great drowning wave with him to destroy Jerusalem and wash it away. It is too high. So ever since then, Gur brings his drowning wave up the river with the tide to have another try. He hasn't done it yet.

Told by my aunt, Miss Annie Tongue, at Alkborough, 1930, when she was about seventy-three. She probably heard it at Blyton Carr.

NOTES Another nature myth about the Aegir on the River Trent.

Six

Rhozzums

26 Walter’s Men
27 The Clammer Bridge
28 A Cure for Toothache (two versions)
29 The Harvest Firkin
30 The Courageous Fellow

26

Walter’s Men

Dorset

One evening, when Walter was having his pint at the ‘Fox and Hounds’, there was a ‘foreigner’ from Rugby way a-bragging how many men worked for him, and what a troublesome crew they was.

‘How many be there?’ asks Walter.

‘All of two dozen,’ says the ‘foreigner’, very proud.

‘Oh ah,’ say Walter, ‘I got two hundred but none of ‘en answers me back.’ He finished his pint and went out.

‘Who’s he?’ asks the ‘foreigner’, quite aback.

‘The sexton,’ everyone is glad to tell him.

From a Somerset folk-lorist at Brishop's Hull, who was told it as a Merriott boy staying at Portland in 1890.

27

The Clammer Bridge

Devonshire (Exmoor)

[NOTES A clammer is a tree trunk cut down and thrown across from bank to bank. Sometimes it is cut in half presenting a fairly flat surface. Sometimes it is provided with a rough hand rail, more often not. It is usually rather slippery and likely to be dangerous.]

At harvest time an Irish itinerant labourer had been told they were wanting hands at the upland farm of Wilmersham. On his way he would have to cross Horner Water. It had been raining heavily during the past week and when he arrived at the Clammer Bridge the river had risen as it often does some six or seven feet and was within a foot of the clammer.

This time the hand rail had been swept away by last week's flood. The Irish labourer regarded it with dismay, noting the muddy scum which covered it. Then he thought of his long walk and need of a job. So he said courageously, 'God is good', shut his eyes tight and stepped on to the clammer. He arrived quite safely at the other side, heaved a big sigh of relief, then remarked thoughtfully, 'And the Devil isn't so bad either.'

From a W.I. member, Spaxton, 1961, and from a patient at Middlesex Hospital, 1966.

28

A Cure for Toothache

Somerset

Version 1

Someone met an old farmer in the village street with his head heavily bandaged and remarked, ‘Why, Varmer, you don’t look too clever. What be wrong, then?’ ‘I been laid up, down to hospital.’ ‘Whatever were the matter then?’ ‘Toothache, I had ‘en raging so I calls to mind what Mother used to do when us was little. She’d get a hammer and make us lay our heads alongside gatepost and then she’d give top of post a good sharp crack with hammer and either toothache stopped or tooth comes out. So I calls to my man Fred to bring along sledge hammer. He’s a good feller is Fred but he isn’t exactly. You has to be very careful as to how you explains things to him, very careful indeed. So I takes Fred and shows him the gatepost and hammer and then I says, ‘Now Fred, when I do lay my head against post, you up and hit it—and that’s just what he done!!’

From Taunton Deane, 1912.

NOTES I knew of this remedy being applied to a school-fellow’s toothache by her mother (who was from Stoke St Mary). It was also known and used in East Anglia in the early 19oos.

Not exactly or *he’m lacking* are Somerset colloquialisms for ‘mentally deficient’.

Lancashire

Version 2

This is told of a blacksmith and his Irish apprentice with the second hammer. ‘When I nod my head, hit it.’ He did!

Heard in 1920.

29

The Harvest Firkin

Oxfordshire

There was a lazy, hard drinker who never worked unless it was harvesting time when the farmer sent out a firkin for the labourers. Then he was the first to come hanging round out of his turn.

They used to send him right out mid-field under everyone's eye but he sneaked back to the hedge if you weren't quick, for a sly swig.

My grandfather's men got pretty tired of this and hid the firkin but he sneaked round and found it and when all were busy he ran off with it.

He'd got a good skinful already, so he made for the woods and lay down on the turf side of a mound that had a hawthorn on it—I *said* he'd already had a skinful, didn't I?

Well, he says that's what made him too drowsy to move.

Well, first he saw something small and green by the barrel, then another and then a whole crowd; but somehow he couldn't move. Then all of a sudden he was alone, and could, and he did.

He picked up the firkin for a long swig. 'Funny dream I had,' he said, 'all about nothing.'

And little voices all round twittered back at him, 'And that's what you'll find in the firkin!'

Told to me in 1966 by a nurse at Middlesex Hospital who was told it in her student days by an Oxfordshire student nurse whose grandfather was a farmer, about 1900.

NOTES The tale is, of course, a widespread jest, but I have not met fairies as the instruments of justice.

30

The Courageous Fellow

Somerset

There were a fellow who 'wadn't exactly' and they took and send'n to take pig to market. They telled'n to keep a tight hold to pig's tail and seed'n do so. Pig didn't exactly relish it but chap he kept hold as he were told. They met up with a girt bear as run away from his bear-ward and when folk come with bill-hooks and pick-forks they vound'n laid dead with chap's

hand right down his drout. Bear were a-choked dead and chap were a-sitting there so quiet and patient as a old ewe.

Folk called'n all sorts of a courageous man but all he say were 'I be only waiting vor pig to come out!'

Taunton Deane, 1908.

Part Three

One *Old Tales and New*

1 The Three Valiant Lads	*Derbyshire*
2 The Treasure and the Dreams	*Oxfordshire*
3 Poor Mall's Pilgrimage	*Kent*
4 The Grey Mare is the Better Horse	*Nottinghamshire*
5 The Green Ladies of One Tree Hill	*Derbyshire*

Two *The Fair Folk*

6 True John and Greedy Jack	*Oxfordshire*
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Three *Legends*

11 Room for a Little One	*Wiltshire/Somerset*
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21 The Basket of Lilies — *Sussex*
22 The Daisy Dog — *Cornwall*
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24 Whippendell Woods — *Hertfordshire*
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Six *Rhozzums*

26 Two Ainsworth Tales — *Lancashire*
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One

Old Tales and New

1 The Three Valiant Lads
2 The Treasure and the Dreams
3 Poor Mall’s Pilgrimage
4 The Grey Mare is the Better Horse
5 The Green Ladies of One Tree Hill

1

The Three Valiant Lads

Derbyshire

Hundreds of years after the monk drove him away, the Devil again came out of the north like a dragon. He brought thunder and tempest and fire with him and all fled before him. They did not know how to save themselves and their towns.

Then a young, slim lad came to the blacksmith. ‘Can you make me a sword?’ he asked, and pointed outside to a long, heavy bar of iron. The blacksmith just laughed at him and told him a stripling like him couldn’t even lift it, but he called his two younger brothers. ‘One can’t but three can,’ they said, and they stood the iron bar upright after a struggle. The blacksmith liked the little fellows’ courage so he hammered out the long,

sharp blade for them, and then they staggered in with another shorter bar to make a crosspiece. It was so wide a man could put a fist on either side to grasp it, and the smith welded it to the blade and asked no questions. Blacksmiths know more than most, so he kept his mouth shut, except to say, ‘None of you young lads can carry the sword.’

‘One can’t but three can,’ they answered and they wrapped it in a woollen cloak and carried the sword away slung between them.

Just as they began to climb up they met a farmer. He looked at the weary lads and the great sword in its sling. ‘Where are you bound for he asked.

‘Winlatter Rock!’

‘You can never carry that great sword up to the Rock.’

‘One can’t but three can.’

They got there at last and were trying to lift the sword up onto the Rock when a shepherd came hurrying by with a flock of sheep. He sent his dog on down with them, and took a moment’s rest from running away.

‘What are you trying to do with that great sword?’

‘Set it atop of Winlatter Rock.’

‘You’ll never lift that up there.’

‘One can’t but three can.’ And they propped it up against Winlatter Rock and twisted the cloak under its crosspiece, and the older two clambered up and pulled and the youngest steadied it as it was hauled up and there it stood upright in the holes the monk’s footsteps had made, and the shepherd gaped. They hammered the point in firmly and looked away north.

‘Smoke,’ they said, ‘he’s on his way. Run down to Grindleford Church, shepherd, tell them to ring the church bells.’

And off the shepherd ran.

‘And,’ says the eldest lad, ‘I’ll bide with the sword. One alone can daunt the Devil.’

‘And I,’ says the middle lad, ‘can tell the Chesterfield men to get to arms. One can shame a hundred.’

‘And I,’ says the youngest and nimblest, ‘will climb Chesterfield steeple and watch for your sword spinning on Winlatter Rock to outface the Devil —then I’ll shout to ‘em to ring all the church bells. One can climb where a dozen can’t.’

So off they went and the dragon came on, setting the whole countryside waste and rejoicing in his mischief. Then he came in sight of Winlatter Rock and the eldest lad. He was furious and raised a terrible tempest but

the eldest lad just stayed there spinning the great sword in its socket. The lightning flashed on it and down in Grindleford and Chesterfield folk saw the signal and ran to ring the bells, and at the first peal the tempest was gone and the dragon was seen, all his mile-long length, with steam rising around him from the burnt hills. There he stood, brought up sharp by that hateful sword, and in front of him on Winlatter Rock the great sword stood, still now, and shone like a cross in the pale sunlight. Then he looked again and the hillsides were covered with climbing men who held up their swords hilt-upwards like a forest of crosses. And that finished the dragon. He turned and lumbered for the first dark cavern he could hide in, and went down Blue John Mines—no one has ever reached the bottom of it—but that is why so many Derby-shire springs are warm and taste like the Devil. He's left Derbyshire for ever they say, but Winlatter Rock is still there, but not the crack that held the sword.

As for the three valiant lads, they left the great sword for the folk of Chesterfield and Grindleford, and went home.

Collected from fragments of legends not more than a sentence long,, from sayings such as 'One can't but three can', from a longer, embellished late eighteenth-century romantic tourist tale recounted by two old ladies who had known it all their lives, and from a handful of children exiled from their home counties during the waryears. The period of collecting wasfrom about 1928 to 1949.

NOTES There are obviously several legends fused into the final tale and it is a very satisfactory example of local handling of scrappy material. Here one can find traces of the pre-Christian and the monastic tale, and thinly disguised traces of the lasting terror of the Norse invaders. The geography is that of any local tale-teller, who usually shows a complete disregard of fact, provided he can include the Blue Mine in his tale.

See also 'Winlatter Rock', Pt One, No. 5.

2

The Treasure and the Dreams

Oxfordshire

1 *Introductory*

Buried or lost treasure has an almost instant interest for most of us. There are hundreds of folk-tales, scraps of tradition, colloquialisms and proverbs still in use in Europe and these islands. Some, indeed most, of the folk memories reaching back through the centuries are dimmed as to particulars, but have a strange persistence of their own. This has introduced almost universal ominous beliefs of treasure guardians and of the ill-luck attending the removal of a hoard (as with the removal of the treasure from Tutankhamen's tomb in the 1920s). England has a small quota of such uncanny traditions, of which perhaps the Welsh Border legend of the Gold Man is better known to folk-lorists and archaeologists as the excavation at Mold, Cheshire, of the Romano-British warrior in gilded armour in the early nineteenth century. Country tradition insists on recurring dreams leading to the final discovery of treasure. I heard scraps of tales in Shropshire, Gloucestershire and Somerset, following the route of the pedlars and the River Severn. In East Anglia perhaps the best-known tale of the Pedlar of Swaffham is an international dream-legend placed in what is recognized as an uncanny area of England. There are no doubt many more in our counties, but most show an interesting tendency to be deliberately lost to memory for a century or so and then to be recalled by means of a series of dreams to a varied assortment of dreamers, who are often completely ignorant of any hint of treasure or of its locality. Such a dream is that of the Maple Durham Treasure.

2 *The Treasure*

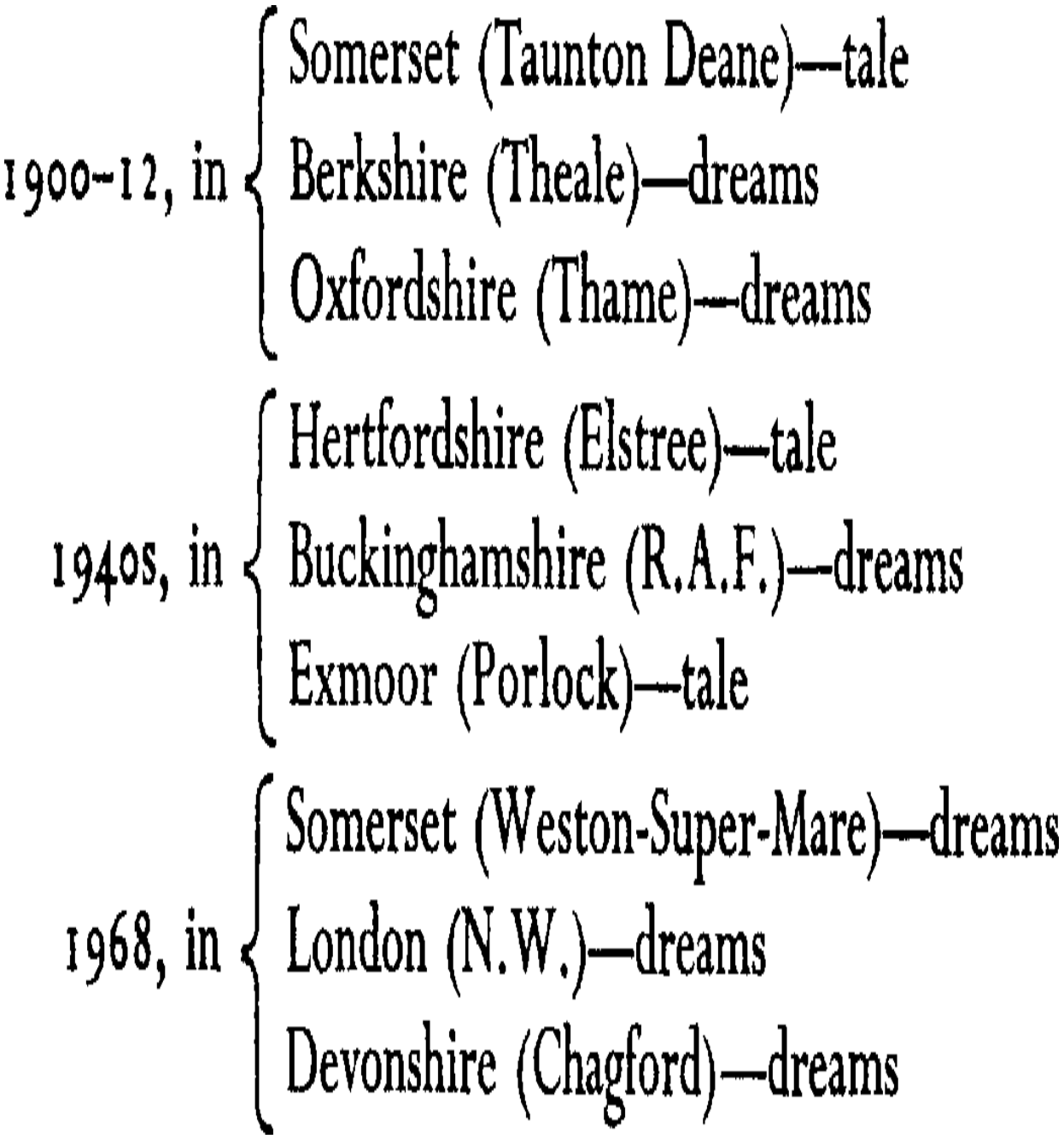
This budget of notes has been collected over many years from both oral and printed sources. The whereabouts of the treasure is still kept secret, but an amazingly clear dream of its contents is retained by the dreamers of the past century in widely scattered localities. The gipsies of the nineteenth century to pre-First World War betrayed some knowledge of its whereabouts and referred to it in some of their oral tales, but any such knowledge has again gone underground since then. Helpful camouflage is being indulged in: adroit questions are parried by both gipsies and country folk by the age-old method of 'sending the fool further'. We shall have to wait for some dream recurrence due in the 1990s to indicate to the folk-lorists some vital hint of locality.

3 *The Dreams*

These occur approximately every twenty-five or thirty years and have been noted sporadically over one hundred years. The taboo of describing or even mentioning treasure with its attendant ill-luck is more widely adhered to than archaeologists realize. The dreams recur three times within the year to the one dreamer and are quite vividly described: there are bags of money, metal bars (probably of gold), and a pack-animal's leather budget with thonged sides burst at one corner showing rings, brooches, and fragments of jewellery. They might have belonged to different centuries, lost in the morass from the backs of the pack-animals during winter flooding. The vision is limited to a small, gravelly area with fragments of dried-up marsh plants. I have not yet been told of two dreamers having this dream at the same time.

4 *The Treasure Seen and Pictured*

One drawing was made within two hours of a Berkshire (Newbury) dream and shown as a matter of interest to a Berkshire labourer at Theale, who recognized it at once. His first eager comments were brief, but enough to indicate a whole treasure legend extending over past centuries. By dint of careful tracing of clues, the pattern of the dreams is becoming a little clearer. The last occurrence of the dreams was in 1968. Enquiries set afoot in Berkshire, Somerset and Oxfordshire by the E.F.D.S.S., the Somerset Archaeological Society and the Folk Lore Society, reveal a pattern as follows:



During the nineteenth century, fragmentary references were recalled orally, but no written account of the uncanny, or of the hoard or of the dreams, has come to light. Belief in the arrival of ill-luck because of such an account is very strong.

5 *The Drawings*—(see pp. 140–141)

(a) ‘My grandfather he had the dream but he knew better than to go looking.’ From an elderly road-man, Theale, Berkshire, 1948.
(b) ‘My granny used to say there was an old man when she was a child that had the three dreams. At Marlborough that would be.’ Reference to the 1850s, from a landlord’s wife at a small inn near Abingdon, Berkshire, 1949.
(c) ‘They waylaid and murdered travellers by the cliffs—steep gravelly banks that slide underfoot—that are by the roadside. They pushed them into the bog below and the murdered lies in the mud and their ghosts keeps the Maple Durham gold safe below. None of us would go seeking it, and the Chorodies doesn’t for fear of what the true Romany would do—us taking good care to keep all safe.’ From a rough recollection of a conversation with a gipsy, Mrs Cordelia Cooper, in Worthy Woods, near Porlock Weir, Exmoor, Somerset, during the author’s war-time travels in the 1940s.

Chorodies are vagrant half-gipsies, often called ‘diddekai’.
(d) The following tale was told in a camp near Radlett, Hertfordshire, in 1942 by an old ex-circus couple to spite their gipsy neighbours, who had told them to go and pitch their tent over near High Barnet.

‘Oh yes, I’ve heard that lot talk about their Maple Durham—all right, Daddy, they can’t hear with you sitting at the tent door cleaning and shining saucepans! Ears like hares they got, Miss, and make no more noise than a cat. They’re real terrified anyone should know—as bad as Daddy, in case they guesses what I can tell—and tell I will, after *them* telling us to pack up and be off, and Daddy ain’t no match for four or five of them. We’re only waiting now for my son to come and take us up and every bit of baggage with his lorry, so I don’t mind letting on.

‘Here’s their precious tale!

‘There was a robber-chap and he had a barmy bloke as his pardner and they hid on a bad bit of road near Reading, wasn’t it, Daddy? Travelled over it with the show going Bristol way we have, again and again, but that lot over there would have it the road was narrow above a nasty marsh where a great lot of gold is sunk, they gipsies knows where. And the barmy bloke stops travellers and says he’ll guide ‘em and the robber he waits in the hedge and clobbers them. Then they rids ‘em of all their vallyables and rolls ‘em down the bank into that nasty marsh—don’t matter if they’re still alive. The mud buries them quick.

‘But all those ghosts there scares the daylight out of the gipsies. They won’t talk of it—won’t let no one else neither. Brings bad luck!’

Maple Durham has become proverbial and there are tales among the gipsies rarely mentioned. The old circus lady’s tale is very probably true, but in her anger she confused the locality and road. Maple Durham is on the Oxford side of the Thames. There was a pack-horse track to the old ford, but otherwise no road, only old paths. It must have been very marshy and the track would have been overgrown or flooded in places.

Other casual corroborative references to the treasure are to be found in the following gipsy folk-tales:

(a) ‘The Long, Long Worm’ (Pt Two, No. 2).
(b) ‘The Jug’ (Pt Three, No. 12).
(c) ‘Gilsiand’s Gry’ (Pt Three, No. 25).
(d) ‘Jinny’s Gibbet’ (Pt Three, No. 19).

There is also a Welsh Border tale told by a Lloyd in a caravan near St Albans during the War (1940s), but it has no doubt been collected by a Welsh folk-lorist. In it, a passing reference to the treasure is made. It is a version of the ‘Cheating the Devil’, which is known in many areas.

Gipsy friends cautiously warned me that the dreams had come ‘back and back to when we came’ (a reference to their ancestors’ arrival in England during the fifteenth century). It seems that it always came three times to chosen dreamers—to Lees, Lovels, Smiths, and to a ploughman and a farmer—about every twenty-five years from the 1470s (?)

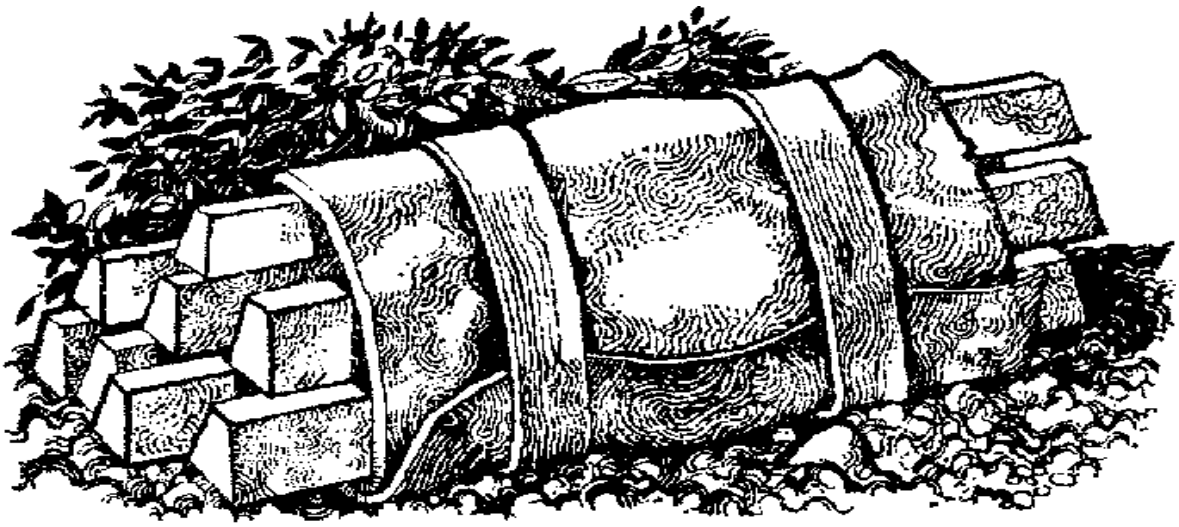
The Maple Durham Dream

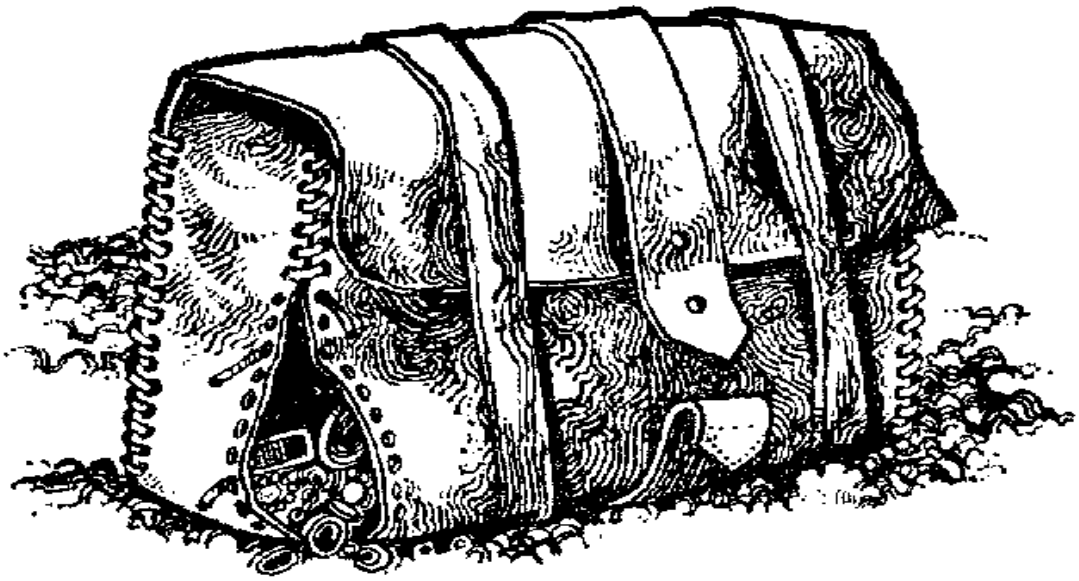
Drawing of the treasure which has been consistently dreamed about on three occasions by many non-local people from pre-Tudor to modern times.

(1) Eight metal bars, dirty greenish-black in colour, with glimpses of reddish metal. Perhaps of gold? Length of bars approximately 9 in. jagged out; wrapped and bound in thick hide and leather straps, with no knots visible.

(2) Pack-horse budget or wallet containing ornaments and jewellery (brooches, rings, buckles, chains). The buckle of the wallet has fallen off; the wallet is thonged, not sewn, and the thong has rotted in the left-hand corner.

(3) Money-bags of heavy, sodden, black leather. None have draw-rings, but draw-strings (thongs) are still in place on two of them, which are both full and intact. Thong rotten and broken on third bag, but money still inside, with about four coins partly buried in gravel. No knots to be seen.





onwards. There is no mention of it during the Commonwealth or earlier witch-trials. Even now, reference to any knowledge of it is extremely guarded. At least six gipsy tribes had their own knowledge of some tale of treasure, but still considered the mention of it dangerous to them. A few country folk use it as a proverb and have a vague idea that ‘there was one of they old tales’.

7 *Possible Locality*

(a) Reading area (Berkshire). Miss Mary Tombes, an E.F.D.S.S. member, whose father was a Reading man, inclines to a belief that the knowledge of treasure hidden all around the area during the Reformation has been orally collected and repeated under an ‘umbrella’ title over the centuries ; the dreams that accompanied the earlier legends helped to keep them memorable.
(b) Maple Durham (Oxfordshire). Miss Christina Hole, the Honorary Editor of *Folk Lore*, has tried to follow up another fragmentary tradition, going back to Roman times, which tells of an over-loaded pack-animal and a group of soldiers who entered the forest banks and disappeared, perhaps massacred or drowned.
(c) Maple Durham (Thames Lock). Mrs Handley of Middlesex, whose father owned some boats at the Maple Durham Lock, believes in a Roman tradition of a pack-horse, over-loaded with military monies, being drowned during a flood in this area.
(d) Maple Durham (Hampshire). Enquiries are being carried out by a Bournemouth resident, who is a member of a team of Morris-dancers and of the E.F.D.S.S.

8 *Personal Theory*

My own theory is that a trackway across marshy country was used by soldiery and merchants, and during the centuries one or two pack-animals were lost, together with their loads, in the ooze. Later, the marsh may have been drained dry.

Research is still going on to prove that this old tradition of ghostly dreams may have a real foundation.

3

Poor Mall’s Pilgrimage

Kent

There was a lord at the castle and his children all died as babes. His noble lady bore them every year but they all died before their fourth year and it meant the lands would go to his wicked brother who was never known to do a good or kind thing to anyone. The serfs were in dread of him and served their own lord in far less fear, though he wasn’t a good man either.

His only remaining child grew to his fifth birthday and there were great rejoicings. There was a feast and the younger brother came too.

When the lady was gone away with her son, there was feasting and riot and the women were sent for—dancers and town wenches the lord had told to come—they would be well paid—but there was no wench for the younger brother.

He sent for the steward and ordered him to bring the prettiest serf in the village for his night’s frolic. The steward dared not tell his lord, who was very drunk, for fear of a quarrel between the brothers so he sent for a serf. She didn’t want to go, but her father beat her till she went weeping.

In the morning when the guests left the women went away well paid but the younger brother rode off without giving a penny to the poor lass. And the dancers jeered at her and the steward packed her off home before his lord came to hear of it, and poor Mall went away weeping, and her father beat her for crying and then drubbed her well for bringing no money.

One day the noble lady rode by and told her grooms to stop. ‘Why do you beat your daughter like that?’ she said to poor Mall’s father. ‘Can’t even a brute like you see how ill she is?’

‘She’s a lazy slut,’ he stammered. Not more than a furrow has she pulled my plough today.’

‘Do you wish her to fall in the furrow and have her babe there?’ says she in fine scorn. ‘Go into your hut, girl, and someone shall come and tend you.’ (There were a dozen women run to help for the sake of the noble lady’s smile.)

When she turned to the father she had no smile for him. ‘Yoke him to his own plough,’ she orders the villeins, and ‘put him to till all his own allotment strip and all yours—and every time he stops lay his goad on him.’

Then they did it gladly.

The next day the noble lady came by and saw Mall at work with the hoeing, the babe bound on her back, trying to keep up with the men. She sent for the father to take *his* proper place. And all sore and aching as he was, he ran to do it; she sent for the women who had been so eager yesterday and they came flying too in fear of a good beating—and they got it from the castle grooms.

Then the noble lady looks down at poor Mall and the strong, lusty babe, and says, ‘Go in and rest. Food and care must be given to you. At the end of this month I shall send for you both and maybe your eyes will be happier.’

Then she rode away and all the village served poor Mall and the babe as if they were precious gold—and hated her.

But it was scarce a fortnight before the steward himself came for poor Mall and her babe, all in black he was and he scowls at poor Mall’s babe. ‘A boy-child—it would be; and my lord’s last son dead of a fever just before his sixth birthday, and my lord raging and my lady’s heart broke, but she thinks you’ll be safer under her eyes—she’s a saint.’

So poor Mall and her boy were smuggled into the castle and hidden by the noble lady’s old nurse whose arms were empty, and one day she comes to the grieving lady with bad news. ‘Never let my lord know but his brother wed Mall on the birthday feast before all the guests, and this bonny boy will be a lord one day.’

The lady looked at poor Mall who was braiding her jewels in her hair, then she takes a long golden tress of Mall’s and looks at her own thin braid side by side—then she shudders and says, ‘A serf!’

But it was true, and poor Mall on her knees tells the tale. A rush ring it had been, but a ring for all that, and a wicked, drunken chaplain to marry the pair—and what could poor Mall do?

All she did now was beg for her babe’s life. Her own didn’t matter.

But the noble lady says, ‘The babe is a fine healthy boy.’ Here she sobbed just once. ‘My lord will not let him live to grow up as his heir when he gets to hear of him. We must send him away to be a priest.’

So poor Mall was parted from her babe in secret, and he was carried away to an abbey to serve the Church and the noble lady bore no more babes but said Mall should look after *her* now.

One day the lord went with a great company to the Feast of Christmas at the cathedral and saw a singing boy that had golden hair and a most beautiful voice. But when he looked at him closely he had his brother's face.

He galloped home in a red rage *but* his noble lady lay on her deathbed, and that quieted him while she said, 'Your brother's son will be a monk. He can never marry—have no fear of that. It was a better way than taking the child's life.' And with that she died and poor Mall was hustled away back to the village where they all hated her and her father beat her. She grew plainer and sadder with every year and no one worked harder.

Then the lord would be married again—determined to get a son of his own he was—but on the journey the bridal party met the wicked younger brother and the brothers fought then and there, and ended by killing each other, so the lands were held by the King's Council until a true heir was found. Nobody knew but the steward and the nurse, and they were too old to be sure of all the happenings.

So poor Mall lived on in the village, and they beat her and threw stones at her, and lamed her, and went on hating her until a new priest came to the village.

The villeins laughed when they heard he was coming, but when they saw the size of him they were almost civil, especially after he tucked the blacksmith under an arm like a young oak and tossed him into the river, then swam out and saved him from drowning and hauled him in by his beard and tipped the fourteen stone of him up by his heels to drain. Then he picks up Mall like a baby, little, skinny, ugly old hag as she was then, and binds up the leg blacksmith had thrown a hammer at, and carries her to her hovel and tends her pain. Then he comes out and tells his parishioners that he wasn't seeing the poor and helpless abused in God's parish—the other priests had *said* that—so having been a soldier before he turned priest he believed greatly in the power of doing rather than just saying.

That parish was a marvel in a short while, two or three even went to church beside the children, and the men became quite civil when the priest yoked himself to a poor, sick fellow's plough and tilled all his allotment for him.

And on through the years he tended Mall's shattered ankle—by and by she became too weak to use the crutches he had made and just lay patiently in her dark hut. And one day she said, 'Father dear, you've kept life and hope in me till I've come to pray God that afore I die I may somehow crawl to Canterbury and see my son.'

'Have you a son living, Mall?' says the priest, for the villeins had told him she was crazy and the babe had been killed by the old lord.

'Oh yes, Father, he's the great Prince Bishop there,' says Mall. 'I used to get word of him till Master Steward died years back.' Then the priest looked at her steadily and saw that for all her illness she was not crazy and he longed to put the light of happiness in those still lovely eyes.

'We'll get you to Canterbury, Mall,' he told her, 'and within the week. You shall be a Pilgrim and ride, poor as we are.' 'Ride, Father?' she says in wonder.

'And what's wrong with my strong back?' says he. 'If I can't carry a slim old body the few miles, I don't deserve to be called a Servant of God. I'll start early with you tomorrow morning.'

But on his way homewards men, women and children fled past him yelling, 'The Bull! The great White Forest Bull!', and took shelter in their houses.

Now the sick man couldn't run yet and came stumbling, crying for help with the great white wild brute's hot breath almost on his neck. The priest ran too, straight at the bull and standing between them steadied himself and swung a blow like a sledgehammer right on its nose. The bull dropped like a stone, its neck broke, and in falling it rolled on the priest.

They lifted off the dead bull, marvelling and wailing, and found their priest below with a broken leg.

All he said to their clamour was, 'I promised Mall to carry her to Canterbury tomorrow as a pilgrim—now who'll take my place with an ass or a cart?'

Oh, they all would *with someone else's ass. So* he chose a steady little lad and said his mother and Jenkyn the father should come and get two-pence he had put by for a new cassock when Mall and the donkey were back home safe again—and then had a cup of water, and lay there alone in great pain.

By and by he got up and went to Mall's cottage and she was lying ready waiting for him, for it was dawn, and off they went and met the pilgrims nearing Canterbury. Mall sang little hymns of joy and her lovely eyes were

bright as he strode along with her and she weighed no more than a kitten. They came to the cathedral steps, and there before all the Prince Bishop met them, saying, ‘Welcome to my dear mother and to this good brother of God!’ Then Mall went with the Prince Bishop, and the parish priest knelt where he was with bowed head until his leg pained him direly—and behold he was lying on a rough sheepskin couch and a shaven monk had tended his broken leg and eased it with bandages, and a tall, cloaked man stood by watching.

Then he knew it was the Prince Bishop. And said, ‘Oh my Lord Bishop, did the boy bring your mother on the ass to see you?’ Then said the Bishop, ‘Jenkyn was drunk again and beat the boy and his wife and took the ass to work—*but you carried my mother to me on your back.* She is safe and happy with our blessed nuns, and wished you to be thanked. I sent to seek, and at last we got news of a dead bull and a lamed priest in my own village, for now it is mine. Therefore I came to clear the matter and take you into my castle as chaplain as well. But now I find you with a broken leg. How could you carry my mother and journey eight miles this morning?’ ‘The Good God alone knows,’ said the priest humbly.

This ends the wonderful tale of the parish priest and the little miracle.

This Kentish tale did not come from the Canterbury area but probably travelled as a monkish legend round the country.

It was told in pieces by Kentish men and women before the twentieth century and related as a whole by an elderly Kentish parson on wartime duty, East London, 1918.

4

The Grey Mare is the Better Horse

Nottinghamshire

The old lord died and the eldest son had died before him. The youngest son was lord now but no one knew where he was. He went to seek his fortune many years ago. Some say he went to the Virginias or the Indies or that he was dead too. So there came a cheese-paring twister of a Yorkshire dealer with a paper saying he was a lawyer come to sell the estate. Nobody could read to see it was all a forgery, and the old parson was blind, so the lawyer

had it all as he wanted and he said he'd come next day and take it all away, all the rents and the pigs and their three cows and old Farmer's fine plough-team.

Just everything he took—even the next morning's eggs! Standing oats, meal in the meal-chests, green-stuff and fruit, the whole lot! And the forest villagers could be all out in the road with nothing at all!

When the old parson spoke to him he just grinned like an ugly cur and said he was bringing wagons to take it all away and then he'd set his constables to burn the cottages. He was a liar and a thief and a half—but the old priest went sadly away into the forest.

Next day all the women stood weeping and old Farmer's wife said, 'We need Robin Hood again.'

'That's what we all do,' said they.

'Then here he is and Little John too,' says he, and out of the trees he came in a long green cloak and a huge fellow behind him in a brown one.

Old Farmer's wife gave him a big smile and was going to speak out but he tips her a wink and she thought better of it.

'Not a word from any of you,' said Robin Hood. 'Just do exactly as I tell you and you'll all be the better of it.'

They were all ready enough to do that, now he'd come to their help. So he told the old parson to get the broken plough back in the furrow—the men did that for him—then the parson calls the women to haul the plough up field and old Farmer's wife was the team-leader and wore the bell. Golly! She wasn't half a bell-horse too—set them all a spanking pace, so when the twister came with his wagons and a fool of a rich booby who was going to buy the estate and cut down the forest, he met up with Robin Hood and Little John and the men, all waiting and very silent too—and that is when Sherwood folk means business.

Well, the lawyer was too busy talking to the booby to notice all their hands were behind them full of stones—but the booby had sharp eyes and he edged away behind the two carthorses and they were so famous he stopped to look at them and the twisting lawyer began to sell them then and there.

Old Farmer begins to lift his blackthorn but Robin Hood he just says aloud, 'That's less than the price for your one good grey mare, Farmer!' and of course the twister heard him.

'What mare's that?' says he, very sharp.

‘You never saw such a marvel,’ says Robin Hood. ‘ *You* couldn’t buy her.’

‘Oh, couldn’t I?’ says the twister nasty-like. ‘I bet I could buy her. What’s the wager if I don’t?’

‘All the rent and all the gear you think to take away.’

The twister lays out a bulging hag of money and gives it to the gaby to hold. ‘Now, where’s this wonder of yours that can beat that pair? Can she hoe?’

‘Oh yes, and rake too, gather the apples and trot with a load to market on her head.’

‘On her *head*! It wouldn’t stay!’

‘Oh, she goes on two legs.’

‘Two What else can this marvel do?’

‘Carry the wood, fetch the water from the well...’

‘I daresay—and cook the dinner no doubt?’

‘Most likely, but you’d never buy her from me—nor will any of us part with ours.’

‘Yours!’ The lawyer looks at the men nodding. ‘I’m not buying the lot.’

‘You’re not buying any,’ says Robin Hood. ‘You’ve run out on your wager and we’ll have our rent money and gear back.’

Then Little John took the money from the gaby, who took to *his* heels and Robin Hood slipped away into the trees saying, ‘Take a look at the old grey mare leading the other plough-team.’

And there was old Farmer’s wife, her white hair blowing, all a bustle and sweat like my granny, and my word the woman was going at it like one o’clock.

Then the twister found out what Sherwood folk were like and the weight of their sticks and stones. Then they threw him into his wagon and his men and teams ran for it.

When they came to the high road there was the sheriff and his men and in front of them was the young lord safe home again from soldiering, with a laced coat and white wig and sword at his side and sitting a grand horse and behind him on a great big trooper was his great big servant with his hair clubbed and his horse pistols and red coat and rolled-up cloaks on the saddle.

‘Take that forger, Master Sheriff,’ says the young lord. And the sheriff does and they hanged the twister then and there.

But what my granny won't say is—was it *really Robin Hood?*

Told by a Nottinghamshire schoolboy when staying with his aunt at Bakewell, Derby, 1928. He had that vivid memory characteristic of children, and echoed the words of the other tellers of this tale, which sounds eighteenth century in its setting, but probably dates from a much earlier period.

NOTES *Mare* was the country name for women in many counties up to the nineteenth century.
Gaby—simpleton.

5

The Green Ladies of One Tree Hill

Derbyshire

There were once three tall trees on a hill and on moonlight nights singing could be heard and three Green Ladies danced there. No one dared go near except the farmer and he only climbed the hill once a year on Midsummer Eve to lay a posy of late primroses on the root of each tree. The leaves rustled and the sun shone out, and he made quite sure he was safe indoors before sunset. It was a rich farm and he often said to his three sons, 'My father always said our luck lies up there; when I'm dead don't forget to do as I did, and my father before me, and all our forbears through the years.'

And they listened, but did not take much heed, except the youngest.

When the old man died the big farm was divided into three. The eldest brother took a huge slice, and the next brother he took another, and that left the youngest with a strip of poor rough ground at the foot of the hill, but he didn't say much but set to work about it and sang as he worked and was indoors before sunset.

One day his brothers came to see him. Their big farms were not doing very well and when they saw his rich little barley fields and the few loaded fruit trees, and his roots and herbs growing so green and smelling so sweet, and his three cows giving rich milk, they were angry and jealous.

'Who helps you in your work?' they asked. 'They say down in the village there's singing and dancing at night. A hard-working farmer should be abed.'

But the youngest never answered.

‘Did we see you up the hill by the trees as we came? What were you about?’

‘I was doing as Father told us years ago. ‘Tis Midsummer Eve,’ he said quietly enough then. But they were too angry to even laugh at him.

‘The hill is mine,’ cried the eldest. ‘Don’t let me see you up there again. As for the trees, I need timber for my new great barn, so I’m cutting one down. And you two can help me.’ But the second brother found he had to go to market, and youngest never answered. The next day, Midsummer Day too, the eldest came with carts and men and axes, and called to his youngest brother, who was busy in the herb garden but he only said, ‘Remember what day it is.’ But the eldest and his team went on up the hill to the three trees. When he laid his axe to the first tree it screamed like a woman, the horses ran away and the men after them, but the eldest went on hacking. The wind howled and the two other trees lashed their branches in anger. Then the murdered tree fell down, down on top of him and killed him. By and by his servants came and took the dead man and the dead tree away and then there were only two Green Ladies on moonlit nights.

The second brother came back from market and took both the farms for himself, and the youngest he still worked his little strip of land and took primroses up the hill on Midsummer Eve. But the big farms didn’t prosper at all and one Midsummer Eve the second brother saw the youngest brother up by the two trees. He was afraid to go up there, so he yelled, ‘Come off my land and take your cows away breaking my hedges down. I’ll build a stout timber fence round my hill and I’ll cut down one of the trees to make it with.’ That night there was no dancing together, there was no music but the crying of many leaves, and the youngest brother was very sad. The next morning the second brother came with an axe and the two trees shuddered but he only made sure there was no wind to drop the tree his way. The tree screamed like a woman as it fell and the youngest brother watching from the lane below with his cows saw the last tree lift a great branch and bring it down on his brother’s head and kill him.

People came and took the second dead tree and man away, and the youngest brother now had all three farms, but he still lived in his little farm near the hill and the lonely Green Lady. And sometimes she would dance alone to a sad little tune on moonlit nights, and he always left a bunch of

late primroses at the roots of the one tree every Midsummer Eve and his farms prospered from that day.

There are many people nowadays who won't climb One Tree Hill, especially on Midsummer Eve, and one or two very old people remember being told when they were little children that it must never be fenced because it belonged to a Green Lady.

The hill and the tree are there alone.

It is a sad and dangerous place.

Told on a charabanc tour on a run to Grindleford and the Sheffield moors, by a Derbyshire couple from Baslow in 1935.

NOTES The interest in this is the tree worship still retained, the fairy mound, and the incorporation of the Three Brothers motif.

Primroses are magic plants, especially in late May and June.

Two
The Fair Folk

6 True John and Greedy Jack
7 Lazy Lawrence
8 Call up the Chimney
9 The Lantern Lads
10 Tom Cockle

6

True John and Greedy Jack

Oxfordshire

There was a raggedy man your grandfather knew well and he had been a rich farmer at one time. Nobody liked him or would give him a hand's help, and this is why:

There was an old man called True John with a cottage and he had one fruit-tree that was a world's wonder. It was always loaded with such fruit as no one else could grow and people came even from Oxford City to buy and take away—all those miles. True John never charged more than the penny a pound and he never sold more than three pounds to anyone. He said the fruit was to be shared to rich or poor alike. 'Me and my helpers wants it that way,' he would say.

And who were his helpers?

Well, there was always a cloud of little birds round the tree chirping and tweeting and folk said at nights there was hundreds of little lights bobbing in and out the leaves and sweet singing and the perfume of the blossom cured all your troubles.

So True John lived poor but happy and never lacked daily bread, and something over for a beggard.

This didn't suit Greedy Jack, the rich farmer with all his orchards. He had plenty of fine fruit, but there were no lights and singing. When he saw birds he shot at them, him and his men.

Then he shot into True John's wonder tree too (accidental on purpose!).

The birds flew out in a cloud straight at him, all greens they were and peeked at his eyes and chittered till he and his men ran away. His men didn't come back to work again, and when he got home and bathed his sore eyes in the spring and looked at his own trees the grass was covered with fine spoiled fruit all with holes in them where the shots had gone. But True John's tree was as full and ripe as ever.

Greedy Jack got new men but couldn't seem to prosper ever again, so when old True John died he bought his cottage and garden too—and the very first thing he did was to chop down the wonder tree to spite everyone.

'Now,' he tells the countryside, 'there'll be lights in all *my* trees and you will have to come to me—and I shan't charge only the penny a pound I warn you.'

Well, he never did!

There came a queer wind that very night and laid every tree of his flat, and there were dancing lights and voices singing and twittering

True John is gone, gone, gone!

and they all went with a flutter of darkness all but one light and a little voice that wailed,

Greedy Jack, Greedy Jack.
We shall never come back.

Then that light went out too, and something green was gone, and with its going went all the luck of the country—Greedy Jack's as well.

Told to me in 1965 by a visiting W.I. member, Middlesex Hospital. She said that her mother was an Oxfordshire woman whose grandmother told this tale to the children in about 1890.

7

Lazy Lawrence

Dorset

They call he Lazy Lawrence but he just isn't that—fine, free, wild colt *with green eyes* and a set of teeth that makes all 'pixying' boys drop all the apples they've been up trees after and run for their dear souls' sake—not to mention bitten breeches and what their mother might say. He's a true beauty is Lazy Lawrence, and if so be as your conscience is clear and you're in a far-away-enough safe spot you might be lucky enough of a full moon to glimpse him galloping round and guarding his orchets.

Gallop? He can almost fly that pony can—no thief can get away from his teeth and his heels, and if you fronts his green eyes they'll transfix you then and there—can't move hand or foot.

> Lazy Lawrence let me goo,
> Don't hold me summer and winter too.

That's about the right of it. There was a farmer's widow that had two fine orchets left her—rare, fine apples too—keep her in comfort all her days when harvested and sold to Wareham Market; but she was getting up in years with a blossomy head to her and needed help. She'd always been one as kept to the old ways—dish of cream and pail of spring-water set out of nights, and help she got.

Not before it was needed.

There was a black-hearted old conjurer that coveted the widow's apples, so he goes on with his spellings, and all without a word said, until he was safe inside a great apple-hamper, then he makes it roll into orchet—him safe inside away from hoofs and teeth, and then he makes a silent magic and all the apples in the orchet come pelting down in a magic circle all round that hamper and into it too atop of him.

He hadn’t bargained for that and when a nice prize cooker—Bramley I expaxt—gets him full in the eye he yells ‘Ouch!’ and climbs out the hamper without a thought and fetches up right under Lazy Lawrence’s teeth.

Then he got showed what happened to thieves that made spells they broke themselves by shouting out of their turn.

Round and round his ring of apples he was drove and well kicked and nicely nipped and he tried to be clever and run t’other way and come right in view of the colt-pixy’s green eyes and that stopped him altogether.

Next morning the widow and her helpers come for the apple-picking. There was all the apples in a gurt hamper, and in a hugeous ring, and conjurer stuck in the middle like a crow-scarer with hoof marks and teeth-marks plain to see, but there was *nothing else* in the orchet.

All the folk come and had a look at conjurer a-transfixed there and no one heaved a mudspat—that would have freed him too quick—but they whispered and pointed to a ring of hoof marks in the dew that went all round outside the apples, then they contented their hearts with laughing and shouting to him.

‘Hey, old thief! Have Lawrence got into your legs?’ but even that didn’t free him.

When the sun come up the dew and the hoof marks went—and so did he—right into the next county. Some folks say he’s still running, but what with only being able to see where he’s got on account of his one eye he hasn’t got so far as he’d like.

Told to me by D. Barnett, of Broadstone near Poole, 1928. Other references to this tale are from a member of the E.F.D.S.S., 1951; A. Adam, of Crowcombe Park Gate, 1958; and a member of Kewstoke W.I., Somerset, 1964.

8

Call up the Chimney

Devonshire

My husband exchanged pulpits for one holiday a few years ago, and we went to a little church in Devon on the edge of Maldon. The house was very old indeed, long and low and thatched. It was always very dark, but I liked it, though queer things occurred. One day I was going to light the fire, and put on a stew for us, for our supper at night when we returned after a day's outing. Something disturbed my attention, and I went off, forgetting to light the fire. We came back that evening, resigned to bread and cheese. The fire was alight and the stew was hot. We had been within sight of the house all day. We had seen nobody go there, nor had we seen any smoke. Another time the same thing happened in reverse. I forgot to take off the evening meal, which was cooking, and put it aside to be heated again. I remembered it in the afternoon, by which time it should have been a crisp. We arrived to find it taken off the stove and waiting to be warmed up. I was advised, if I wanted the fire to burn up brightly, to shout up the chimney for help. It always came. The only time They disapproved was when I found a delightful nook in the heather, and settled down to sew in the sun. That afternoon I lost two needles in quick succession and then the needlebook disappeared too. I took the hint, and we left the nook to its owners.

From a W.I. visitor, a rector's wife, staying at Kilve, 1963.

The following two anecdotes contain references to the theme of 'Call up the Chimney':
(I) I was on a Devonshire walking tour and was allowed to sleep in a very old, empty cottage. The old woman, who had lit a fire that wet night and left some bread and cheese for me, said as she went away, 'If yew do want for anything yew call up the chimney.'

From a West Country parson, about 1900; told to my father.

(2) My mother used to tell us this tale which her mother-in-law told her. She came from Devon and it was well known in her family. It happened a long time back to her great-grandfather and his sister. They were good little children and their father was an officer fighting in America (1770s) and he took the mother with him and they were left with the old housekeeper whom everyone trusted.

One day she had to go to the town and see about some family business and she left the children with the housemaid. This housemaid was a bad creature and stole all she could lay her hands on, and ran off with the children in case they told on her.

They came to live in an old cottage on Haldon. The poor little children were in rags and starving, for the wicked woman sold everything for drink and left them all alone there for days together.

One day the little girl was crying with hunger and they heard someone say, ‘Go and call up the chimney! But don’t say “Thank you”.’ and there was a little woman in a red cap. So they went and sat in the great, cold fireplace and called, and ran out again frightened.

They smelt cooking and went in and there was a good fire and a hot dinner.

They never starved after that. They just called up the chimney—even when the wicked woman stayed away over a week.

Someone saw the chimney smoke and told a farmer who was counted ‘wise’ and he went there. Nobody else dared, and he found the ragged little children. He took them home with him and was careful not to say ‘Thank you’.

They sent for the thief-takers and caught the thief. The old housekeeper had set them to trace her, and of course she had sold all sorts of stuff for drink so they took her and hanged her at Exeter Gaol.

My mother told us when the children were going away with the old housekeeper again they passed the empty cottage and the little boy called out, ‘Thank you!’ The little girl looked back, crying, and saw smoke curling out of the chimney as if it were waving goodbye.

From an elderly lady who was a patient in Middlesex Hospital, 1968.

NOTES This is surely the other half of the two previous items, dated 1963 and 1900, details of which still appear in the tale today.

Compare ‘Food and Fire and Company’, Pt Two, No. 12, which directly contradicts this tale with regard to spoken thanks. See also ‘The Hound of the Hill’, Pt Two, No. 9.

Thief-takers—Bow Street Runners (late eighteenth century).

The Lantern Lads

Suffolk

There was a carter who was a steady chap that worked well and the farmer thought highly of him. A bit too high the stable-lads thought, though nobody could say that about either of them, but give him a fright they would, to make him the laugh of the country.

Howsondiver [However], they would do just that, they would.

Now carter had a name for courage and what's more that [he] had the good word of all the ghosts and bogles and Lantern Lads round about. That had a friendly way to bogles and all, and no doubt it would be something of a change to that horrud kind. On thats way home along the dike above the marshes, that see the Lantern Lads' lights dancing, with their calls for help. That just laugh kindly and calls out a neighbourly 'Good-night'. That were never frittened when a white flapping ghost came along the dike-walk. 'Hold on a bit!' that calls out, 'Or you'll be down in the water. 'Tis a marvel how well you do manage. And without a head too, poor chap. Move over this way a bit, I'll give ye a lead.'

Well, the ghost was very well pleased to be spoke to in neighbourly fashion after years of runnings away and screeckings and that used to meet carter on his home trudge for a bit of company and Lantern Lads come quite close in to wave their lights beside carter's way when that walked.

There were some who knew about this and held him high in their minds —but not two little fools of stable-lads. Their fastest Norfolk trotters never looked so fit with coats a-shine like his Suffolk Punches did. They were jealous and silly-proud, and had a trick or two for him, they had.

So they take two lanterns one dark night—and one was *Farmer's own*, and out on the dike they wait for the carter with the lanterns lit to guide that all astray down into the mud and waters of the marsh. Farmer's candle was bright (the big 'un had it) and cart-shed rushlight were a bit dim so tiddy chap had it. Then he start to shout and holler 'Help!' to mislead carter more, and then someone else hollers 'Help!', close by, and the silly young fools goes a-running that way thinking 'tis carter, waving their lanterns and laughing till they both found themselves deep in—the tiddy 'un up to his armholes and the big 'un to his waist, and then they yells another tune.

The big ’un drops Farmer’s lantern and it seem to goo that deep he stays where he is and goo on with his yelling and tiddy ’un bellers ‘Help!’ and someone else laughs horrud. All round that horrud laughing were and they didn’t like it at all and then they heard carter’s voice a-calling them—but they was afraid of another Lantern Lads’ trick and never answered till the tiddy ‘un gets that cold and thinks he’s sinking and then he lets out a beller for his mother.

‘Here you are then,’ says carter out on the dark dike side, ‘I’ll send the spaniels to find and catch holt and bring yew into the dry.’

So Farmer’s two spaniels waded out and towed them to earth-bank. ‘Bit wet yew seem,’ said carter friendly-like. ‘Yew get back to kitchen fire and dry off. Best hang up your two lanterns before Farmer finds they were took.’

And he went on homewards and left that two with only one lantern between the two of them and that *wasn’t* Farmer’s one.

Told at Gilwell Camp, 1928, by a Suffolk Scouter who occasionally lapsed into dialect.

10

Tom Cockle

Westmorland

There was a family who come from the mountains of Ireland to live in the English Lake District, and they didn’t want to come but they had to. They were homesick for their old home and they hated leaving their luck behind.

His name was Tom Cockle and he had taken care of them for hundreds of years. No one ever saw him but the countryside knew he was there. Somehow there was always a meal and a bed however many might turn up even when the family fell on bad times.

At last the times were so bad and dangerous they had to leave Ireland for good and go to the mother’s English home in the North Country, but before they went they had to tell Tom Cockle they were going.

The father and mother called out and told him, ‘Oh Tom, dear Tom Cockle, it’s having to leave Ireland and you we are, and our hearts are broken on us.’ Then they went away and they all cried at the going.

The mother tried to cheer them up all the way, but there was muddle and hunger and loss every minute by land and sea.

‘At least we’ll be away from the cities and in mountains,’ the children comforted each other. ‘And fell ponies to ride, and trout in the streams and wild fowl in the lakes,’ but the mother wondered to herself how she’d manage the old, cold, empty house. She had loved it, but it needed twenty servants or a Tom Cockle to light fires, and fill larders, and sweep, and cook, and warm their hearts, and Tom Cockle was away back in Ireland. And in Ireland she only had to call out to Tom and tell him what she needed and there was always something to hand.

She bravely hid her tears, and as they drove the pony through the rain to her new, old home she made plans for a fire and at least a drop of porridge. It was bad enough coming over dark mountains on a cold, rainy night to an empty house. They had always come home to a welcome in Ireland. Tom Cockle had seen to that.

Then one of the children cried out, ‘There’s the house down there, it’s got *lights*!’ Yes, it was their new, empty house, but there was a fire in the hearth, food on the table, fodder in the stable and lights to welcome them —Tom Cockle had got there before them.

An Irish version of a Tom Cockle tale heard in 1931. Told by Mrs Fisher, at Combe Florey W.I., Somerset, 1967. *Also heard in Warwickshire, 1920s (correspondent), and in Westmorland,* 1911.

NOTES This is a rare story of a ‘hob’ following the family. There is a similar Canadian tale about a Scottish brownie.

A ‘tutelary fairy’ tale.

Three

Legends

11 Room for a Little One
13 The Jug
14 The Cheshire Cheese that went to Heaven
14 Four Eggs a Penny
15 The Undersea Bells

11

Room for a Little One

Wiltshire/Somerset

Bridget were the little maid at the big inn where all they travellers comes and she were on her two little feet from daybreak till the chime hours, a-running up and down with all she had to do in the kitchens, and as if that weren't enough she had to be off and gather wood from the Selwood Forest and see and bring it in for firing—great loads too—but they did think to give she a little nirrip so as she could bring two loads to the once back home. And when all t'other Christian souls was warm and snoring hours since she just about finished the washing and cleaning and mending up the fires, and then she run out shivering in her bare feet to the nirrip's stable to

get warm again, crowded up against the little rough coat. ‘Twas a very little nirrip and a very little stable—just a old shed with old thatch the stars shined down through, and room for a little one —but they both of they made it two and contrived to sleep sound till cockcrow.

There come one bitter cold night, snow and frost, and the inn was full up to the roof-tree, with stables and bartons full of beasts too.

Bridget and the nirrip come back numb to the bone and that loaded you couldn’t *see* nothing under the firing but their feet, and they was like blue ice-blocks; and there in the yard were a bone-weary, clarty old hungry plough-ox, left without a mouthful of hay or shelter, and freezing to death he was, and they both couldn’t have that.

‘I got a stable,’ says the nirrip.

‘And there’s be a bit of hay too,’ says Bridget.

“Tis ours,’ they said, ‘but there’s room for a little one.’

The old ox took a look at it.

One great star were a-shining down into the yard and into thic stable too and somehow it did have a look big enough for a mortal freezing old ox.

And somehow it were.

And somehow there were quite a goodish bit of hay inside as well.

So Bridget let the nirrip creep in too—and away with her to make up the fires. She thaw her feet a bit that way and then, would you believe it, they said they’d need more wood.

Back to the girt, black forest she and the poor little nirrip must trudge again in all the bitter wind and frost, so her went to tell the creature and her nearly cried when her did. The little small thing were so stiff and numbed as she were.

“Twill be wicked black dark,’ says Bridget. ‘Oh, I be that a-feared to

‘I’ve a cross on my back,’ says the nirrip speaking up brave. ‘And that there star a-shining above will show the way,’ says the old ox comforting. ‘I’ll a-come back too if you do like, then us’ll only be needing one girt load.’ So, tired to death as they all was, they goes to the forest.

Bridget she had a slice of stale bread from the pig bucket, and the nirrip and the old ox still chewed a bit of hay—’twasn't much but something to keep ‘en from starving, and they got their load.

Then they all seed somebody under the starlight. A man and a woman ‘twas, and they were just about so tired as the three of them was. The man was the woman who couldn’t hardly walk no more.

‘She do need shelter,’ said Bridget. ‘And food and a bed—and there were no room in the inn.’

‘There’s my stable,’ said the nirrip under her great load.

‘And room for a little one,’ said the ox all a-shiver as he staggered.

So the man he up and took the little nirrip’s wood and the woman rode on a tired, careful little back.

Ever so careful nirrip were, and they all found they was going back to inn quite fast in the starlight.

Then Bridget she saw the man and woman go thankful into the little stable, and they beckon the nirrip and the ox inside too, then they all called out to Bridget standing in the snow and starshine all in her bare feet, ‘There’s room for a Little One!’

‘I’ll come, my dears, when I’ve a-done my work,’ said Bridget, and away she went and dragged the wood to the hearth where the ox’s master lay drink-taken and she washed and cleared up, and found a bit of clean bread and cheese.

She took that out along with her. She’d a notion they must be hungry in the stable—and the star shone bright as if it were dancing and Bridget’s feet they danced too.

So out she run and the stable was all a-lit by the great star and God’s dear Son was there too with the others and there was angels singing—the nirrip were a-singing too.

I gave Him my manger all full of sweet hay;
I knelt with the shepherds on Chrissimas Day.
The Star it shone over—and loud I did bray.
Gloria in excelsis!
Christ the Lord is born!

Told to herfamily by a Wincantonfarmer’s wife, about 1900.

NOTES This is one of the many nativity legends. It shows a Wessex admiration for, and gratitude to, the hard-worked—both four-footed beasts and down-trodden humans.

The carol at the end of the tale is ‘The Carol of Christ’s Donkey’, which is mentioned in *The Chime Child (5967).* It was sung by Patrick and Delia Flynn in about 5906.

Nirrip—young jenny-ass.

Clary—muddy.

12

The Jug

Northamptonshire

Old Mr Smith, the tinker (also called Petulengro), tells this tale.

He had his tent and cart by the roadside out near Kettering way where there was a nice little spring and good bite for the ass. Always had a kettle swinging over the fire and he could make a good cup of tea I can tell you. Many's the one I've had and *a drop of something to flavour it* for his friends and he'd tell this tale.

He hadn't no love of parsons or police, Mr Smith hadn't. He could be off in two whisks of the dickey's tail and all any policeman could find for all his looking would be the hot ashes, and him and cart and dickey and tent, not twenty feet away in under the trees: and back we'd bring 'em and set 'em up again when all was clear again and finish our hot tea. Very good tea that was.

And this is the way Mr Smith tells it.

There was two very, very old gipsies, Smiths they would be, for 'twas all the years of God's world ago. And they had a little tent to keep out the rain and they had a little goat to milk and make cheese, and a beautiful jug to keep the milk in. Oh my dear God! that was a lovely jug! It was all glass and jewels, and like a moon rising and a sunset together, and it came from Maple Durham. No one knew how, but they knew it did. Such beautiful jugs can't be made even by the Romanys. And no one asked, not even the Lloyds, and the old people never told, even though it was all the years of God's world ago. The old people kept it hid away carefully and it *always* had milk in it for a drop of tea (herb tea) for the thirsty.

But of course those that *had* wanted more from those that *hadn't*, and someone talked.

Along come the priest. 'Move off the road-side,' says he. 'I'll send a man for your tent to put my hounds in.'

So they took the tent away, and when it rained the old gipsies got in under the bushes, and kept the firing dry by sitting on it, and they hid the jug, and there was always a good cup of tea for the thirsty on the road.

One day my dear Lord and St Peter came by. ‘I’m thirsty,’ says St Peter, ‘and so is my Master. Is there a spring near by?’ (This here very spring in this here very dell,’ Mr Smith says.) And the old gipsies they crawled out on their stiff all-fours with the bowl of blackberry tea and the jug of milk. ‘Drink in the dear Lord’s name,’ they said.

Then up came the bailiff, as was the policeman them days, and hauling the little goat.

‘Be off you four vagabones! Put out the fire!’ he bellers. Fat as three store-hogs he was, and no one dare face up to him. So he trample on fire, and St Peter who would ‘a bin a useful sort in the ring, being a lusty, hasty sort of chap, he begun to get a bit hotted up.

And when the bailiff’s little pig-eyes catch a sight of the jug, he grab that from the old gipsies who was giving it to my dear Lord.

‘I’ll have that,’ says the pig.

‘Take it,’ says my dear Lord.

‘What’s more I’ll keep it too, what you stole,’ says the bailiff and then St Peter took a hand. ‘Oh no you don’t!’ says he and the bailiff knew a fighting man when he saw one—and he don’t like what he saw, so he steps out of fist-reach and swallows the jugful of tea—scalding hot all down to his belly it went and it was so painful he up and throws the jug right past St Peter and let it smash into five shards on the stones of the road.

Now you’ve done it!’ says St Peter, and the poor old gipsies broke their hearts and wept sore, and that bailiff clutched his burning belly and really looked at my dear Lord for the first time, and he went curd-and pale and run for it.

Then my dear Lord comforted and blessed the two old gipsies, and St Peter ran sharp to catch the little goat again.

When he came back with the goat my dear Lord had gone on his way but the old gipsies was standing up and walking about, straight as withies, beside a yellow-wheel caravan with a dickey in shining harness in the shafts, with the criss-cross on his heavenly back no bailiff or priest dare lay finger on, and they had a fire going and a kettle hung over the three sticks steaming just right for a drink of tea for a man who’d done a bit of running. And there were five jugs brimful of milk instead of just the one, and all came from Maple Durham too.

St Peter looked at the road and there wasn’t a broken piece in sight. ‘That’s all right then,’ he said. ‘Thank you for that mug of tea—now I

must be off after Him.’

He Him up, and there was the bailiff too.

My dear Lord was watching, all quiet, but oh my soul! that bailiff he were getting rid of that stolen bellyful of tea as fast as he could but he never come to the end of it. What came out, and what come up filled a great puddle across the road and right down the hill to the river and you had to hold your nose tight because it was no lavender.

When at last the bailiff was let finish, my dear Lord spoke to him. ‘The greedy reward themselves,’ He said, and He went on his way with St Peter till they came to the river.

‘There’s a nice dish of trout here, Lord,’ says St Peter. ‘I’ll catch a few and run back with them to the old gipsies.’ And he did, and my dear Lord sat and bathed his sore feet in the water, and it is blessed for healing ever since that day.

The old gipsies found a nice salmon among the little trout under the wet grasses, but being true Smiths they asked no foolish questions even all those years of God’s world ago.

But the bailiff he had grown so weak and thin his own wife didn’t know him, and chased him off with a broom, and he had to take to the roads himself.

I never heard that any of us gipsies offered him tea, but I guesses he had learned to say ‘No’.

This was told round thefarmfireside at the Dascombes’ farm near Taunton, about 1907. The teller was Jim Bailey, an invalided-out regular soldier engaged to Daisy Dascombe. As a child, I did not like the graphic descriptions of plysical disasters in the tale, but evidently the men, women and boys of thefarm enjoyed this Rabelaisian aspect (I imagine the story has mediaeval roots).

It is a curious, homely depiction of a crude heavenly justice, with strange overtones of the classic Philemon and Bauds moralfable. How Maple Durham came into its telling except as a rare and beautiful taboo I cannot think, but there it is, slowly struggling back to memory from sixty years ago.

The rustic anachronisms of Somerset mingled with Romany phrases make it a well-remembered tale of my childhood, partly because I did not think my Manse home would approve.

NOTES The detail about the yellow-wheeled caravan is a nineteenth-century addition, as there were very few showmen’s caravans before that date. Most gipsies used tents and the earlier ass would have had panniers.

13

The Cheshire Cheese that went to Heaven

Cheshire

There was a Cheshire cheese that went to Heaven, and the Cheshire men say it was the right place for it.

There was a farmer's wife made the best cheeses from here all the way to Chester, and the parish priest came visiting a bit too often and going away with a cheese as a gift until she got right weary. 'I'll make him a cheese so big it'll take even him to get through it to this side of next Christmas,' she said and she made it the round of an ox-wheel. When the priest came into the cheese-room and saw the big cheese, he wanted some at once and stuck his knife in for a slice, but she stopped him. 'It isn't ripe and ready. When it is you shall have it sent to you on our ox-cart.' (She hoped it might keep the guzzler away a bit.) Next week the cheese wasn't ripe or ready but he comes and cuts off a bit to see, and the next, and the next and the farmer's wife lost her patience.

So did the Cheshire cheese. 'I don't like stingy snippits and stealings with pen knives,' she says. 'I'm a good honest Cheshire cheese—a bit large maybe, but I know my duty is to be ate to the last crumb, not nibbled away sly by one fat old man. A poor family could live on me for a whole month of Sundays.

> I'm for the needy,
> Not the greedy.
> I'll travel.'

And she rolled down out of the cheese-loft into the yard.

'Hullo!' says the three watch dogs. 'Too big for a cheese you are,' and they each took three huge great bites. The cheese rolled out of reach of their chains. 'Three bites each was welcome food, but four big 'uns is plain greedy—besides, you've helped yourselves to a good half. Now, thanks to you, I'm handier to travel on again.'

She rolled on and met a fox carrying a fat duck. He put the dead duck down and had a go at the Cheshire cheese. ‘You’re a welcome sight,’ says he, taking two huge great bites. ‘I’ll come back again if you’ll bide for me—but just now I can hear hounds.’ He picks up the duck and runs and the Cheshire cheese rolls away the other way. ‘A pack of greedy hounds!’ she says. ‘They wouldn’t leave a crumb of a good Cheshire cheese, down to a half as I am. I knows my duty is to be ate.

But I’m for the needy,
Not for the greedy.’

I must travel on and hope for the best.’

And on she trundled, not a half so large as she had been but nice and sizeable and she rolled right among a flock of geese. She couldn’t get out quick enough for her and by the time she went bowling and rolling down the hill away there wasn’t even a quarter left. The geese were too fat to follow and farmer’s wife had clipped their wings—fed every day they were too—but they were almost too much for the Cheshire cheese that wanted to do its duty. She rolled for safety into a hollow tree. When she saw the size of the hole she got through she nearly cried. ‘Down to just a fist size they greedy geese have made me—hardly lump enough to fill a hungry man’s belly. I’ll risk going down to the highroad, there should be someone there be glad of a single hunk—’tis my duty to be ate.

And I’m for the needy,
Not for the greedy.’

And off the Cheshire cheese rolls down into the road.

She hears a groaning, and there are three blind, starving beggars lying in the ditch. ‘At last!’ says the Cheshire cheese. ‘But now I do wish I was bigger. I won’t waste a crumb.’ And she broke herself into three little pieces and rolls one each into their hands and the beggars ate her all up.

Then they stood up and they were great angels and the Cheshire cheese found she was whole again.

‘You always did your duty as a cheese,’ says one angel.

‘Never minded the hurt and cruel use,’ says the second angel.

‘Heaven can do with a Cheshire cheese like you,’ says the third angel.

And they took her back up with them.

How’s that for a likely tale?

This camefrom Sir Edward German, my uncle, who heard it as a boy visiting friends in Audlem, Cheshire, in the 1860s.

NOTES The tale of the Wee Bannock in reverse! And in rural priestly guise, though I doubt if the original villain was a cleric. This must have been an eighteenth-century addition, as the original is much more likely to have been the mediaeval steward.

The tale is a great favourite along the western dairying counties, and I have heard it claimed by various cheese-makers from Cheshire to as far down as Wiltshire. There they have the Wiltshire ‘Blue Vinny’, a type of local cheese resembling Danish Blue or Gorgonzola cheese.

14

Four Eggs a Penny

Rutland

Tom was very poor, and on market days he took eggs to sell. Sometimes there was only one, and he got a farthing for it. (If there were two, he’d leave one on the window-sill for the old beggarmen who had nothing at all.) One day he was lucky; he found some nests, and he had twenty-four eggs to take, and that would be a silver sixpence for him. ‘I’ll buy a whole loaf,’ said Tom. Then he thought of the old beggarman’s egg. ‘Oh well,’ said Tom, ‘I can get a piece of real bread for fivepence three farthing, and perhaps a bit of butter to go on it, and if he comes by when I come back, we’ll have a feast, and he’ll make me laugh.’ So off he went to market, and there in the road outside the ale-house was the poor old beggarman lying dead.

Tom was very upset. ‘He owed me a penny,’ said the ale-wife, ‘he can lie in the dirt for all I care.’ Tom gave her four eggs, and four more for the half-pennies to put on his eyes for St Peter, then he went to the carpenter to make him a coffin, which was another four eggs. A farmer was kind, and took Tom and the dead man in his ox-cart to the parson, for nothing but thanks. ‘The old man made me merry often,’ he said, and Tom said so too. But the parson and the clerk, they wanted all the other eggs to bury the beggarman in a little dark corner of the churchyard on the north side. So Tom gave them his twelve eggs, and said a prayer for the old beggar, and

came back home as hungry as he went. ‘There’s one potato,’ he said. ‘No bread or butter for me today. It’ll be “Pull in my belt” and “Potato and Point”:

When he got in, there was a nice fire, and there on the table was a big loaf of bread, there was butter, and *twenty-four* eggs.

But there wasn’t any egg on the window sill.

Told by a school -fellowfrom Rutland Boarding School at Gravesend, 1908. It was the only story she knew and she always told it the same way.

NOTES A rustic version of ‘the grateful dead’ and of an international type of folk-tale almost unknown in England.

15

The Undersea Bells

Norfolk

In the old days there were many little fishing hamlets along the coast and in one village there was a church that had bells which rang out over the fogs and storms to warn ships off the deadly quick-sands.

The sea gods grew angry—they hated to lose their victims. Bit by bit they broke down the coast and crept inland, until there was only the hated church left standing on a crumbling cliff. The people had all fled to higher land, and only the priest went to ring God’s bells to serve God’s souls on stormy nights.

He was old and feeble, and he knew the sea would drown him, but still he struggled to save as many souls as he could in the time left to him. He came to the church crawling at last, for the wind would not let him stand upright and the path was crumbling as he crawled, but he knew there was a ship out in the darkness that needed the warning of the church bells. The church began to crumble about him but with his last strength he grasped the bell ropes and pulled. As the bells clanged the whole tower fell in on him, and the cliff and the church slid down into the boiling sea.

In the morning the sun came out and the ship was lying safe away from the shore. The captain stared in vain at the coast.

‘There’s no church along the coast line but we all heard the bells last night giving us warning to keep offshore,’ he said. ‘I can still hear them!’

They all listened and heard them.

Then a sailor cried out in terror, ‘They are still ringing *down below the sea!* Someone is warning us still!’

And they made all haste to obey.

Along that coast the fisherfolk say on bad, foggy nights the faithful old priest still rings his life-saving bells under the North Sea.

Collectedfrom Norfolkfishermen near Mundesley by my uncle, the Rev. John Tongue, Rector of Torquay, who heard it in 1905 and 1928. At one time he was the Vicar of Mundesley.

Also told by a patient at Middlesex Hospital in January 1968, who said it was a legend of the Walberswick area.

Four

Witches and Evil Spirits

16 The Boggart in Top Attic
17 Criss-Cross
18 Rat’s Castle
19 Jinny’s Gibbet
20 Crooker

16

The Boggart in Top Attic

Lancashire

There was a bold lad and his dad’s farm was worrited by a boggart that skreeked and whined and thumped and howled outside top attic window.

‘Hullet sitha,’ says he. ‘I’ll drive them flyting, aye, and I’ll sleep up top attic tonight and all, Dad,’ and he told him how.

His dad said he’d be all right, but his mother she was in a great taking. A notable woman she was always asking where they’d be without her, but somehow they didn’t tell her owt as she’d have wished them to.

So the lad just eased his dad’s mind about sending boggart back where he came from. ‘I’ll see and put my best boots under my bed. Cobbler has

them both new-shoed with a cross of nails an' all. I reckon two of them heft at him will give him some'at to howl at and take him off at the double —that is, if he's boggart—our mother says he isn't, but no need to mention it to her, to come meddling.'

'She won't go up attic,' said his dad. 'She keeps fire cop in kitchen all night and we sleeps on the settles wi' candles on table as light as day. Queer sort of taking on if 'tis only hullet.'

But she *did* go up there at midday when the men was out working.

She had seen him tiptoe up with his best boots, not asking *her,* so up she goes at a trot and there was best boots under the bed. 'Thought he'd go wearing them courting all down Muck Lane,' says she, very wise. 'I'll teach him. His Sunday wear and just been reheeled too! He can trapse in Muck Lane in his ten-year-old pair I throw out for the next beggars to come by.' So down she went at a run and come back up and exchanged them and come down again at a gallop. 'Where'd he be without *me?*' she says to herself.

When it was time for bed no one says owt—the lad he goes on up and his mum and dad beds down on the kitchen settles with candles and firelight and all, and the boggart starts up. Then there came two crashes and all went quiet. 'That's jannock,' says farmer and goes to sleep contented.

When morning came there was no lad down to his porridge so up his parents went to the attic. No boy, no boots, and they never saw him no more—and where'd he be without more of his mother's help?

Told by North Midland friends while I was in hospital, 1966.

NOTES *Hullet-owls.*
Jannock—all right.

17

Criss-cross

Huntingdonshire

There was a farmer and he had a fine cow in calf. She broke out and went to wander away. ’Twas a bad time of night and a worse time of year for the new-born, so he sent his cowman and the dairymaid to bring the cow and her calf safe home, but he didn’t care to go himself. They were a courageous God-fearing pair and full of sense—but he never says a word to his wife—she would never have sent a soul, not *that* night.

So Roger the cowman he gets the horn lantern and lights it. It was black dark outside and the lantern made no difference.

Now those two never used three words if two would do. They were the right ones to send. Roger looks at blue spark of candle. ‘Dead dark,’ he says and Susan says, ‘Hold hard.’ Then she takes a full salt box rolled in her apron and sprinkles a bit on candle.

It came up like a star.

Then Roger takes the halters and the horn lantern and Susan keeps a tight hold of his arm, and off they go, and every seven steps Susan drops a little criss-cross of salt that shines all along their way.

Out by the Top Meadow they hear an angry cow in distress.

‘Calf’s born,’ says Roger.

‘Best *run,*’ says Susan and she throws a fistful of salt ahead **and the** candle burned full.

Up top of the meadow it was dark with the pushing and crowding of things they couldn’t see rushing to the new-spilt blood. The cow stamped and blorted again.

‘Can’t bury. No time,’ says Roger still running.

‘Sahli do,’ pants Susan and she cast a fistful cross-wise. The dark drew many and the things that crowded, the candle shone steady, and there was the red cow and her tottery little red calf.

Then Susan made a circle of salt and criss-crosses round the four of them and Roger he smoked his pipe across and under the beasts’ backs and bellies and prays in silence and slips on the halters. Then Susan she pours a criss-cross of salt on their backs, praying too, and they were ready to get back to the farm—if they were let. It wasn’t far.

The salt was getting low but they started.

Roger he slung the little calf over his shoulders, front feet together and back feet together either side of his neck, and hold the lantern high and ready and Susan she tied the cow to her wrist. It wanted no pulling and kept up a good trot and then Susan had one hand free for the salt whilst the

other linked with Roger's arm so they was *all together.* The darkness drew in round them again, but they could just see the salt crosses of their path ahead and they hurried.

Then the crowding darkness closed in *all round them* but Susan still had a pinch of salt all ready and Roger kept the lantern steady and **bright.** *Then* out of the blackness came the Witch Maiden and she pointed a white arm and sang,

Hi dicketty dee! Hi wicketty dee!
That red cow belongs to me!

But Roger and Susan points a hand each with crossed fingers at her and sang back like church bells,

Criss-cross,
Thy Loss!
Criss-cross,
Thy Loss!

The Witch Maiden gives back two steps and sings again,

Hi dicketty dee! Hi wicketty dee!
That red calf belongs to me!

But Roger and Susan answers her in the same old-fashioned way and come on,

Criss-cross!
Thy Loss!

The Witch Maiden gives back four steps, and nowthey are almost at the yard gate, then she raised both her white arms and sang shrill and loud,

Hi dicketty dee! Hi wicketty dee!
The both of you belong to me.

But they raised both their hands with crossed fingers and pointed at *her,* and the darkness crowded in all around but they sang out bravely,

Criss-cross!
Thy Loss!

And Farmer's wife in the house heard them out there and being a brave Christian woman seized the brass three-candlestick and flung the farm door wide open. There was firelight and candlelight—oh yes, Farmer had thought best to bring the other brass three-candlestick now—but no one spoke.

Six candles and one in the lantern!

Seven candles and crosses of salt.

The Witch Maiden gave a scream at losing her victims, and went away like a wailing night-bird to become the witches' feast herself and the blackness went with her.

Right away she went, then the wailings stopped suddenly and there was a flare of devils' fire—and still no one spoke.

Then the stars shone again and Roger said, 'Barton's ready,' and he carried the calf safe inside. Susan let the cow go to her stall and took back the salt box.

The farm was not silent any more. Farmer's wife was speaking her mind to the poor man, all through their supper. Roger and Susan could hear it going on.

But I think it was a better supper than they witches had.

Told in Somerset some time between 1860 and 1909, this tale was a prized tradition of Gramma Annah Dascombe. She told it mazy times while I tried not to listen andfailed because I was cuddled against her lame knee and loved her (for this I paid with a terror of evil darkness which lastedforyears).

The tale wasfirst told by the Flemish wife of one of the Sexton clan—she was a refugeefrom the seventeenth-century persecutions—in about 1658, when memories of Matthew Hopkins's witch-hunts werefresh and a still tongue was a virtue. She was married to the sexton who helped Old Parson exorcise Gibberdy' in about 1661 and was gravedigger in a Huntingdon parish. The Somerset sextons are widely named but are generally known by their trade name.

NOTES I cannot recall any purely cannibal English covens—they sound much more like Breton or even Flemish witches. Apparently this witch maiden only held her high position just so long as she contributed live meat to special festivals as a proxy for herself.

I have written about this sexton clan in *Witch-bones and Aunt Tryphena* (MS), which is a collection of their family traditions from pre-Reformation times to the i9sos, when the last of the direct cousins many degrees removed went overseas. With that last departure, Somerset lost a three-hundred-year unbroken treasury of ghost- and witch-lore.

18

Rat’s Castle

Leicestershire

Tom Tinker was on his way home with a load of new tins. There was rain and storms and a bad night for any Christian to be out. Broomsticks and queer laughings and all. ‘I’ll shelter a bit,’ says Tom Tinker, ‘and save my tins from rust, that’s what I’ll do, I’ll wait up in Rat’s Castle. It still has a good roof and four walls, for all it’s got a queer name.’

So in he went.

First thing he noted is there’s no iron bar to door.

‘I’ll be ready for that,’ says Tom Tinker, so he lit a good fire, made a brew of tea and put his tins to dry off and his tools all a-row, hot and handy. Then he filled a tin or two with tea and set them as near the fire as no matter, and he started on his own welcome drink.

He heard a nasty laugh and there was a grinning, hairy bogey sat opposite. Horrible sight he was. ‘Aren’t you frittened?’ says he.

‘Not exackly,’ answers Tom Tinker. ‘Just intrusted. Have a cup of tea.’ And he handed out the boiling tea in the red-hot tin on his pincers.

The bogey takes it and tossed it off, relishing, then he crumpled the tin into a red-hot ball, and bunged it back straight at Tom Tinker’s face.

Now Tom he was a master hand with a bat so up come the pincers and he slammed the red-hot ball straight back into the bogey’s grin. That settled it. There was teeth all over the floor and he didn’t wait for no more.

‘Ruining my pincers,’ says Tom and took a well-earned swig of his own tea, and there was another bogey bigger than the first and he’d got two heads to grin with.

‘Aren’t you frittened?’ says he. ‘Not exackly,’ says Tom Tinker. ‘Just intrusted. Have a cup of tea.’ And this time the tin was white hot and the pincers steamed, but the tea went down easy and back came the tin in a white-hot ball straight at Tom Tinker.

He was ready and waiting for the bowling with his soldering-iron. Couldn’t say whether ball hit one head or both but there was ten-inch teeth all scattered abroad and that one didn’t wait for no more. ‘I hope I’ll get to

finish my tea,' says Tom Tinker, but no, it wasn't to be. A huge hairy hand came clutching down the chimney and Tom let it have a stroke of his best with his hammer and there was a yell that shook the walls.

Tom Tinker he just heaved his dry sack of tins and his tools at the ready and he felt a draught of wind. He looked up and there was a bogey with three heads lifting off the roof.

'Not enough tea left,' says Tom, and he edged to the door.

It was part open and there was a long, scaly tail propping it wide.

Tom he took his tin-cutting shears to it and pinned it where it was.

'Aren't you frittened?' says Three Heads.

'Not exackly,' says Tom. 'You just bide there nicely. I'm going home to fetch my sledge-hammer.'

A Midland Counties rhozzum, told to W. Clayton Jones, near Lichfield, about 1910.

NOTES This is very much a Norse tale, and is still preserved locally.

19

Jinny's Gibbet

Gloucestershire

Red Lloyd the Robber was a black, bad one. His twenty men said so and that there was no one worse in all the Welsh Borders. Then there's a man of them up and says, 'Old Jinny the black witch, she's a worse. She's the blackest and the baddest in all the country from Tudlo-Tem to Pauh-pawnugo-Tem.'

Then they all argues it up and down.

One says, 'She sold her soul to the Devil,' and that made all of them shiver.

Another says, 'So has Red Lloyd,' and they all shivers again, feared to death of him all were.

Someone says out of his fears what should never bin spoke, 'Sexton he come by night by the churchyard and see her dancing there with a black,

hairy goat and giving him a back-kiss,' and they all gets closer to the fire and they puts more timber on it to give a good blaze.

If sojers might be looking to find them they still must have a blaze after that. But sexton was a good Christian knowing what was right to do, and he throws grave-mould from a Christian's grave and he throws it cross-wise and say our dear Lord's Prayer. Then the goat he goes away in smoke and Old Jinny too.

Well they feels a bit better to hear that until Red Lloyd calls them all together, and what does he want them to do but steal the King's Ring out of Ludlow Castle for Red Lloyd to wear, and then all England must do as he says.

It couldn't be done, not even with all of them. There's the dogs and them barred gates and iron doors and sojers and the lords with their swords and pistols, and there was no way to this villainy.

Red Lloyd he will have it. Curses them bad he did and that's bad luck, and they says, 'There's only one so black-hearted as you and that's Old Tinny the black witch. She'd find a way for enough money in her hand.'

Away goes Red Lloyd to find the other sinner, and she's got a way.

'You wants a Hand of Glory,' she tells him. 'And I'll get it for you for gold enough.' Red Lloyd he goes looking for a dead hanged man and that's bad luck too, but he can't find one.

His men, they're not helping—no, not a one—there's plenty of them has seen their friends strung up and they wouldn't cut off a single finger for him, even if the sheriff's men hung them where you could reach. The gallows is wide and high, with twenty men that dangled there, only the birds can reach them. Then Old Tinny says, 'I lost my broom in churchyard. Bruised and lamed I am now. I can't travel the way I used. But find out where there's to be a new hanging and the gold will pull me there.'

Then they brings news from Gloucester Castle that they'd be hanging a poor thief there that week on the hill outside, and Old Tinny she'll be there even if she rides the Devil himself.

So he come for her like a great stinking black he-goat. The dear God keep us safe!

[This was echoed by the gipsy listeners. The Missus pulled out a cross from a chain round her neck and Patrick fascinated, though uneasy, had already crossed and lashed two twigs while the tale was progressing.]

And away the black, wicked old witch rode to Gloucester and the new hanged thief, on the back of ['someone we don't mention, brother,' says the other Marfell quickly arresting the story-teller's folly, and awaking him from his fine, unlucky flow of words].

Well, on a black, hairy back with horns like a Bala Billy Goat and she had to hold tight—faster than a curse the way they are going, and down tthey comes right at the foot of the gibbet.

Then Old Jinny she outs with her sharp flint knife (sharper than my churi) and she reaches up and cuts off that dead, cold hand, with the he-goat's yellow eyes a-watching. So she thinks in her sin what a fine Hand of Glory it will be with its black candle lit, and all Ludlow Castle and Ludlow Town fast asleep by its spell, and the he-goat snickers at her.

Old Jinny she trembles, and forgets the gold she'll earn and looks at the dead hand in hers, and—oh my dear soul and my dear God, help us! —if it wasn't a hand she'd stroked and kissed as it lay on her breast when she fed her only son. Old Jinny gives a heart-shriek, and the black goat snickers terrible! Terrible! And we won't talk any more about it. For it rears right up at her and its yellow eyes shine with fire, and smoke curls up all around them both. The Gloucester men come running but there wasn't no fire—nothing but just a dead hand lying at the gibbet's foot.

[Patrick got up hastily and blundered out followed by the now contrite Marfells—to safeguard themselves by examining the new cob's shoes; the Missus drags me by the arm up to her sacrosanct caravan, and still keeping tight hold rummages in the box under the bunker bed till she brought out a dilapidated Bible. She let me and her breath go in a loud sigh of relief, and when we returned to finish our stew in the tent she was smiling again.]

A gipy tale, probably of the seventeenth century, told in Patrick Fury's tent in Hertfordshire, 1943. I think the teller was a Marfell from the Forest of Dean.

NOTES *Tudlo-Tem* and *Pauh-pawnugo-Tem* are the Romany names for Cheshire ('milk country') and Herefordshire (apple-water country') respectively.

Scattered grave-mould can summon or drive away the Evil One, according to how it is thrown.

In this tale, there appears the Pan-like devil of Wales and Ireland, not the mediaeval devil of fourteenth-century English church carvings and woodcuts.

Back-kiss—Kiss of Infamy.

King's Ring—royal signet.

Hand of Glory—a hanged man's hand, used as a candle-holder for a special candle which puts the robbed into a deep sleep.

Churi—knife. The knife was a flint sacrificial knife.

The teller, hypnotized by this usually never-mentioned tale, was too carried away to stop, and the listeners hastily acted for protection. I was told later that I must have a well of prayers and Bible words to draw upon, since I could read and was therefore safe. They felt that, for them, it was lucky that I was present at that time. Most of the dreaded words of both country and gipsy peoples were mentioned freely by the teller, whose tongue seemed possessed and whose hearers were plainly terrified.

I found the atmosphere most interesting, and was not as disturbed as they were. Also, I came to the conclusion that the Marfells were chorodies (half-gipsy wanderers, even if they had settled in the Forest. They were not so superstitious as the real Romanies, and would ‘show off’ before the true breed.

All the witch-lore in this tale can be found in *Malleus Maleficarum* (1484), the textbook of the day on witchcraft, and in other classics of witchcraft.

20

Crooker

Derbyshire

A traveller was on his way to Cromford late in the evening when an old woman came from the hillside and met him. ‘And where are you bound for so late?’ she asked. ‘The sun has gone down and it will soon be dark. This is no road to travel at night.’

He was silent and then she said, ‘I see you are wise enough not to speak and put yourself in danger, but I doubt if you’ll be safe from Crooker without any of the right kind of help.’

He looked at her in the after-light and saw she was holding out a posy to him. He hesitated, for it seemed as if she were dressed in green, but then he saw the posy was St John’s Wort. The old woman nodded. ‘I wish you well,’ she said. ‘You once freed a bird from a fowler’s net. I knew that bird. Take the posy and when you travel Cromford Road show it to Crooker.’

‘Who is Crooker?’ said the traveller. But the old woman was gone. He was all alone with the posy in his hand. ‘That was an honest warning,’ he thought, ‘but I must go on to Cromford for all that.’

And he went on his way.

Another old woman was waiting for him on the lane side and though it was getting dark he thought she was dressed in green and held a posy of primroses. ‘No one travels Cromford Road at night,’ she said.

‘I must,’ he said, for he knew by the posy she wished him well. ‘My old mother is ill and needs me.’

‘Then show these to Crooker,’ said she as he took the second posy. ‘You freed a rabbit from a snare. I knew that rabbit. And you need the right kind of help.’

‘Who is Crooker?’ asked the traveller, but she too was gone and he was all alone.

‘It will be dark before moonrise,’ said the traveller. ‘I doubt I’ll need my two posies on the road. That was some more honest help but I’d feel even safer with three. I must hasten.’ And he went into the dusk.

At the corner of the lane he met a third old woman in green holding a posy of daisies. “Tis a dark and dangerous time to travel Cromford Road,’ she said. ‘You can do with the right kind of help. Take the posy and show it to Crooker.’

‘Who is Crooker?’ asked the traveller. She did not answer, but said, ‘You freed a vixen and her cub from a trap. I knew that cub and that vixen. So here’s a second bit of advice. Keep as far from Darrent River as you can and Cromford Road runs beside it. You must be on Cromford Bridge before the moon rises.’

And then she too went away into the hill and there he was all alone with his three magic flower posies. ‘I’ll need these,’ he thought. ‘Honest help never comes amiss. But I am so weary I doubt if I’ll reach the shrine on Cromford Bridge before moonrise. I’d be glad of its light, for they say Darrent runs fast and deep and I’d not like to miss my footing and fall in.’

But when at last he came to Cromford Road the moon was high overhead and very bright. The river swirled by just below and there were great trees on the bank above the road. They cast strange, muddling shadows that moved in the breeze.

‘I don’t like the look of those moving branches,’ said the traveller. ‘There’s one tree all by itself that frightens me, its shadows look like

skinny, clutching hands. I'm close to Cromford Bridge now. I'll run past it.' And for all his weariness he did.

Then the river began to ripple loudly as if it were crying 'Hungry!' and on the moonlit road before him he saw the chasing shadow of long, crooked hands like branches. 'Crooker!' gasped the traveller and without looking back he hurled the posy of daisies over his left shoulder onto the road. The shadow disappeared. Darrent River cried 'Give!' and there was a splash.

The terrified traveller began a hobbling run for the safety of the bridge and its shrine, but once more the chasing shadow of Crooker come onto the road in front of him and he hurled the posy of primroses over his left shoulder. Crooker stopped. Darrent River cried 'Give!' and there was a second splash.

Fear lent wings to the traveller's weary feet. He was almost at the bridge itself when once more the clutching shadow lay across his way. With his last strength he turned right round and flung the posy of St John's Wort straight at the wicked tree. It cried out terribly as the traveller gave a despairing leap onto Cromford Bridge and fell in a swoon at the foot of the shrine.

Darrent River roared and moaned and the good people of Cromford looked at each other white-faced. 'Darrent and Crooker,' they whispered. 'We must go at sunrise and get the priest. There'll be another dead for churchyard.'

'D'you remember the old beggar woman we found with a broken neck? Drowned in Darrent one night she was. He roared then.'

But when they came to Cromford Bridge in bright sunlight there was a pale, footsore traveller saying his prayers at the shrine. He got up stiffly and hobbled on his way to the village, while Darrent River ran shallow and sunny below the bank where a great ash tree stood.

Heard in 1927 at a picnic on Massen, Matlock.

NOTES Darrent is the River Derwent. It is very dangerous, being fast-flowing and full of pot-holes, and, like the Dart, has a murderous reputation. However, a mediaeval bridge and shrine provided safety.

The Cromford Road also has a sinister tradition.

At the time this story was told, there was a tree by the river with a most unpleasant shadow, and near-escapes from drowning along this stretch are frequently mentioned.

One early winter evening an acquaintance had returned from London and started to walk home to Matlock Bath from Cromford Station, knowing nothing of its tradition. The moon was full but scuds of cloud and swathes of thin mist obscured the road at times. They walked rapidly and well away from the hedge on the riverside, bearing in mind that the sudden cloud shadows could be confusing. The moon came out suddenly from behind a cloud and they found they had swerved towards the Derwent and were only a yard or so from a gap in its bank and hedge, and lying across the road was the menacing shadow of a dead tree. They were sudddenly seized with panic and sprinted to the open safety of Cromford Bridge. They never went home by Cromford Station after dark but preferred the extra fare and bus back to Matlock.

Five

Ghosts and Curses

21 The Basket of Lilies
22 The Daisy Dog
23 The Red King’s Deer
24 Whippendell Woods
25 Gilsland’s Gry

21

The Basket of Lilies

Sussex

The Lily she grows in the greenwood,
Maidens, maidens take care!
Her sweet-scented breath do tell death,
Maidens, beware!
(Somerset
folk-song)

There was a woman who loved lilies of the valley. She’d be always looking for them or sending her little daughter to find a bunch to bring home, so of

course the little girl sickened and died, as everyone knew she would. As she was dying she said, ‘Dear Mother, promise to lay a bunch of lilies on my coffin.’

It was late on in the year and the mother walked miles in a vain search. She came to stand by the open grave—the funeral was that day and her tears fell for her broken promise—and she looked up and on the other side of the little grave was an old man all in black. He held in his hand a basket of the lilies and he held it out to her *across the empty grave and she took* it, although she had never seen him before. She never knew where he came from or where he went, and nobody else had seen him. She took the basket of lilies home and laid the loose flowers in the child’s coffin and laid the posy on the little girl’s breast and her promise was kept.

All in white the barne did go
All so white as winter snow
Bunch of lilies at her breast
To show she died a maiden.

And three days after the child was laid to her rest, her mother died too.

Told to a correspondent by an old Lewes woman, 1945. *A different version was repeated by a W.I. member at Portishead, 1966.*

NOTES The Somerset folk-song is to be found in *The Chime Child* (1967).

The tale refers to the wide belief that to walk near an empty grave, or in any way to cross it, would be courting death. *Barne*—a girl-child.

22

The Daisy Dog

Cornwall

Collector’s Comment

I was handed this bundle of old letters by a fellow student at the London City Literary Institute in 1928. He gave them to me casually—I did not even know his name—thinking I might be interested in them. He told me

that his wife's old great-aunt, a parson's widow, had died, and in cleaning up all her family treasures they had come across these old Cornish letters. Being too busy to study them in detail at that time, I put them aside with my other folk-lore notes, where they remained for nearly forty years.

They were rescued together with other fragments of my earlier collections from my fire in 1966, but were very charred, almost unreadable, and rapidly disintegrating. I then read what was still legible and decided to make a copy, before it was too late, with a little reconstruction where necessary.

If the letters are a pre-1914 literary effort, they hold both interest and very old tradition. They seem genuine, however, as the letters dated 1850 (or 1860—scorch marks have blurred the writing) are in faded ink on poor sermon paper and are written in an angular mid-Victorian style, while the 1912 letter is in a neat, round, tradesman's clerk's handwriting on cheap notepaper.

I myself am inclined to believe their authenticity. They comprise a merging of many strong beliefs into a composite tale, which may quite well be the coastal history of a curse now lost in a post-1914 world.

Letter 1, dated 1850

Dear Mary,

I am aware you do not expect a letter from me so soon after my regular correspondence but this is a matter so singular and our dear brother Edward is convinced of its truth, and upon hearing his account I must say my dear husband John and myself agree with him.

We hear many strange happenings in this Cornish parish of John's which might have disturbed the mind of our beloved mamma—how I still miss her letters. Now since our late bereavement we feel free to write to other members of the family who I know will be deeply interested—knowing dear Edward's strict views on a 'scientific accuracy' regarding all phenomenon.

It was a very happy occurrence for us all when dear Edward wrote to us from St Bartholomew's Hospital to say that he was coming on his holiday to our own Cornish parish to act as a *locum tenens* to enable our own dear doctor to take the necessary Mediterranean voyage after his severe illness and exposure he sustained, following the rescue work of the wreck last winter.

We were overjoyed to have him with us and Edward appears to get on very well with most of John's parishioners—some are still disappointingly wild and difficult to us.

The older women will talk to *me* when I visit their sick beds; no one else comes to them and they get very lonely, poor old things. One of them, a bedridden granny, told me that 'your Dr Edward' had treated her youngest grandson for a badly hurt hand which she considered fatal, ''Tes a Daisy-Dog bite, ma'am, and us all do know they portends a funeral.'

I asked no questions then—John and I have learnt not to—but on my return to the Rectory, I asked dear Edward. He seemed very disturbed and perplexed and was able to say the boy's life had been saved at present at the cost of the boy losing his right hand. Such a tragedy to a fishing family! He can never draw a full day's pay on the trawler and just as he was commencing his apprenticeship. The boy himself was quite hopeless, and wished he had died, and poor Edward could not rouse him or his family out of this dangerous gloom.

'You will not do so,' said John suddenly. You know quite well John rarely says very much to any of us—but he apprehends a tremendous number of his people's pagan beliefs. 'The boy will die. He is a Trewenna —true pagan Cornish. They are only one generation away from the wreckers. The curse will kill him.'

'What curse?' asked Edward getting very interested in spite of his eeriness—you know how he would like to make a study of the mind— and John and he often converse together for hours. However, John was not going to speak again, he is becoming more and more like his parishioners, so for poor Edward's sake I ventured to ask, 'Is a Daisy Dog a local name for a poisonous sea creature? Some of our jellyfish can be fatal.' But John only said, 'No!'

Letter 2, dated 1850 (one week later)

My dear Mary,

The Trewenna boy is dead. Edward tells us the hand amputation should not have killed him, the boy was very healthy and there was no infection—he died of fear!

A Daisy Dog is not a jellyfish—he is a dog—very small and silky, with a puggy nose and teeth like needles—and he is a *ghost*.

There is a gully on the coast, dear Edward says, where a stream gushes out down the precipitous rocks and rims some fifty yards beside a circular lawn with tall woodland trees and then runs along under the cliffs and out to the rough seas again. It is the kind of place my maids will not go near. They say it belongs to the Small People who keep the wild cliff gardens above Land's End and there are wonderful flowers in that sheltered nook. The wildest sea rushes round and up the gully only about ten yards and there must be a lot of spray, but dear Edward says the cliff edge is crumbling and between the leaves he could just glimpse down to a mound like a small grave covered with daisies—they seemed like the shape of a cross—and lying on the grave was a tiny, silky dog with a pug's nose and feathery tail. It looked up at dear Edward with bright jewel-like eyes (Edward's very words) and he ran back to his cob and galloped for dear life.

Poor Edward was in a dreadful state of shivers, but *would* go on being scientific even while I had to feed him hot soup. 'A tiny dog, like a very small, silky pug with feathery ears and a tail like a curled plume …'

And then I said, 'Uncle Osborne's oriental carved screen and Mrs Wu! I know we used to argue that Uncle Osborne said she was called that—don't you remember Edward? How Mary and I would have it was a Mrs and a Wu and all the rest of you said it was a Mr and a Foo! Well, was it?'

Dear Edward and John were looking at me most strangely. 'This was a Mr Foo! And Uncle Osborne's screen was Chinese,' said Edward getting excited.

And then, my dear quiet John broke in with, 'And the dog is called a Pekinese, so sailors say, and only the Emperor himself has them. They hide in his sleeves as a bodyguard and have slaves of their own, and it is death to touch one, and down here in Cornwall it is known as the Daisy Dog.'

John went into his study and came back carrying a tray and on it was a corner of a carved ivory casket carefully wrapped in a fragment of wonderful golden embroidery that was held together by a jade clasp—he was careful never to touch them. Nor did we. Then he re-covered them in an old blanket and took them back to his study. 'When I have had a word with old Ezekiel Penna I will tell you more,' he said. So now I am writing in post haste and dear Edward is finishing his hot soup and looking better. It was Mrs Wu and Mr Foo, Mary dear, wasn't it?

Letter 3, dated 1850 (one month later)

John has seen old Ezekiel Penna and has a queer, unbelievable tale for Edward. Dear Edward says it is just sufficiently true to make it a quite believable tale here on our wild, stormy, Cornish coast—he has never gone near any of our cliff edges since—but he will find it a task of no little difficulty to speak convincingly in London. But he will, of that I am sure, and he really *did* see the Daisy Dog.

Ezekiel Penna is a righteous elderly fisherman who in his youth travelled far seas. As far as China, where he described the Daisy Dog as an Emperor's sleeve-dog and said in his day no one but their slaves and the emperor ever touched them. And old Cornish fellow-sailors told him the wild coastal tale, but they wouldn't go with him to find the Daisy Dog's Gully. He said old men had told him long ago an emperor sent a pair of these sacred sleeve-dogs to Elizabeth I, the Queen of England, in token of his recognition that she too was a goddess.

To guard them and their family the bitch was enclosed in an ivory cage like a kennel but the dog ran free with a wonderful, jewelled collar. A princess of the royal house who had never set foot on earth was their guardian, and a mandarin of first-class standing guarded her with a small handful of trusted bodyguards. How this strange company ever got to our Cornish seas at all was a miracle, but by the time they did the bodyguards and maids were dead, and there remained only the old mandarin, one slave, the princess and the dogs. The bitch had pupped and the little dog took care of the carefully wrapped up and covered kennel and the princess too. All sorts of wild tales of treasure and a witch without feet were told along the voyage, the further west the poor eastern travellers came. The mandarin's gold brought them far, and some sea-captains knew of Prester John's land. No one ever saw the lady or her silk-wrapped box, but wild tales were told. She had no feet, and had slanted eyes like devils, and the wrapped box in its gold embroidery was filled with treasure. No ship liked carrying her—a witch woman—even the emperor's gold did not bring safety from storms and sea-devils, and so the wild Cornish crew being driven towards our cliffs mutinied and killed captain, slave and mandarin, and burst into the cabin. Even then, only one laid hands on the wrapped box and drew back with a bleeding hand where her sleeve was guarding it. In terror they threw her overboard, black silken locks, smooth ivory face,

and gold-wrapped box, into the turmoil of waves and foam. A huge wave took the princess and bore her like a slingshot right into the gully, and the ship veered away to safety.

The tale of the treasure ran along the coast but the man who was bitten died and then fear grew.

There was a howling devil in that gully—let the sea-devils outside come in and carry it all away, or the spriggans from the rocks above come and take the drowned witch and her jewels—this was a very haunted spot.

So haunted was it that no wreckers ventured there, but a fool did. He was big and gentle and simple and he saw the drowned lady lying unburied there, and then he saw a movement so he climbed down the crumbling rocks to help. He looked at her pale face and he cried over her, she was so strange and lovely. Then, knowing she was dead, he lifted her sleeve to see what had moved and whined, and there, cupped in his great, gentle hand, was a tiny dog with a bedraggled silken coat. It didn't try to bite him as it lay dying but it gave a weak wag of the curling tail. 'Yur she is then,' says the fool and lays the little fellow alongside the princess's face. It gave her a tiny lick and looked up at the fool and somehow he understood and he unwrapped the broken ivory kennel and gently took out the little bodies of a golden bitch and five tiny puppies and laid them alongside the princess. The little dog looks right up at the fool and he nods, 'Help you do need to guard all these as you done manful. Can 'ce keep alive till I asks Father Sennan what's best to do?' And up those tottering cliffs he went, and calls out to the evil spriggans and the sea demons as he went, 'Leave the dead be, our dear Lord wants they!' and he got safe to the old priest in his hiding cell and back again through the dangers. The little dog wagged again once and licked once and the fool stroked his drying coat and with his two great hands digged a grave for the two royal ladies and the five babies and covered it over with moss and grass. 'I ban't noways able to help 'ee more. I can't rightly say no prayers,' says the fool, 'but I'll plant ee' a criss-cross of God's daisies above them. Will that help 'ee guard, little feller?' And he lifts the little silky body among the daisies and it gives him a last wag and a lick and dies. And the fool cries all the way home.

So did I when John told this wild sailor's tale and Edward blew his nose hard and got up and walked about. At last he said huskily, 'Do you believe a word of it?'

And John said, ‘Tommy Trewenna brought me the corner of the ivory kennel and the embroidery. His hand hurt him but he said he was going back to fetch a jewelled dog-collar.’ None of us spoke; I couldn’t, I was still

Then John and dear Edward both spoke together. ‘But *I* saw the Daisy Dog!’

God bless his faithful valour!

Letter 4, dated 1912

Dear Great Auntie,

Here we are back again in London from our long dreamed-of Cornish holiday. We were only there three days and now here I am in Barts, with a broken leg, and the boy has his ribs in plaster and Mary is being kept in bed there for shock.

Do come and see us all—three different wards and they’re keeping the Peke for you to collect her. She’s got a broken leg too.

Don’t you worry, my old dear, we’re born lucky all of us. Our taxi met a lorry with a drunken driver who killed our taximan, laid us all on our backs in hospital and got off without a scratch!

I bet Mary tells you it had to happen. She’d always told *me* the Daisy Dog yarn, that she and her sister, who is a Penna too, believed in like the Bible—you know they did.

Well, she wasn’t seeing Cornwall ever any more, thank you, and as for Pekinese she’d run a mile. So she did till I tried to cure the nonsense and brought home Mee Too as a wedding anniversary present. The moment she set eyes on that fat, fluffy ball of pup we’d all had it—you too, hadn’t you.

Then she was all for Margate and Clacton and Bournemouth and all of a sudden she wants to go see her sister in Cornwall—on a farm *inland.*

I might have known and I bet you did.

So off we go me and her and Jimmy and Mee Too and you having seen us off at Paddington goes home for a cuppa and a fortnight of peace and quiet.

I’m not saying a farm isn’t enjoyable, jimmy and Mee Too were in mischief cyerywhere and kept me on my toes to stave off Mary’s spankings.

Then, blow it if Mary’s sister looks at Mee Too and says, ‘I wonder at you, Mary! That kind of dog! And bringing her to Cornwall.’ And Mary

says, ‘It was meant,’ in that special voice of hers.

So I wasn’t surprised to find she’d borrowed their Essex for me to drive her and Jimmy and Mee Too round a bit next afternoon.

Not near the coast, of course—not a bit of it. Well, I wasn’t doing too badly when she tells me to stop and then she says a bit guilty, ‘I really saw it out for me to see.’

‘What?’ I asked, but I could give a good guess.

‘The Penna Shoe, Great-Uncle Ezekiel wore round his neck to save him from drowning—and *he* was killed by a cliff fall—and no one knows where he got it. It’s Chinese and about as big as a year-old baby’s.’

I the wind ‘Did touch it?’

‘No,’ says Mary, ‘we didn’t dare, and Joe was half angry, said we’d called up a bad blow, and went out to see if his sheep we re ‘a shelter but it’s a lovely fine day, you can hear the sea ever so plain behind those bushes.’

‘Too plain!’ I yells, ‘and those aren’t bushes but tree tops!’

And just then Jimmy and Mee Too being bored gets the car-door open and are out in a flash. I yells to Mary to keep the engine running and I ran too over where they were and I heard a small dog bark and Mee Too yell as she did when next door caught fire, and there she was dragging Jimmy on her lead back over trembly, crumbly ground that wouldn’t have held my weight. I grabbed them both and sprinted the fifty yards for the road and fell into the car and Mary was off and away at almost forty miles per hour as we fell in—but as we went I heard a small dog bark, and Jimmy struggled and cried, ‘Let me go, Dad, and help the little dog down there !’ and Mee Too yowled like that Beelzebub tom cat of yours.

Mary didn’t stop for miles until I got Jimmy and Mee Too quieter and managed to say, ‘Where are we going?’

‘Penzance Station,’ says Mary grimly and somehow we got the train all in one rush, no luggage—tickets luckily still in my wallet. Jimmy was crying and Mee Too a bundle of shivers but the guard was a Cornishman.

He took one look at us, popped us into an empty First where Mary and I could lie out, then he came back with a tea-tray and hot milk and mugs and by the time we’d got our hot drinks, and the heaters were on and the dog and the boy had stopped shivering and crying and were asleep, Mary started up because someone in the corridor had just said some of the Cornish coast was gone. There was the worst storm in years that night and

when the express reached Starcross the waves were over the line and Mary had that to keep her busy. What with lightning and trees crashing and the wind rocking the train it was a proper picnic but we got into Paddington, no waterproofs, no baggage and the Cornish guard wouldn't take any tip. 'I'll give 'ee one,' he said, 'stay in the station till morning.'

The rain was coming down in a roar on the glass roof and it was black dark but Mary she would have a taxi and get home quick. Well, we did get one—and here we all are.

Come and get Mee Too and give her a cuddle instead of the nurses.

I expect Mary will say it was meant.

Sent by a Mr Stanley Carter from the Men's Accident Ward at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, 1928.

23

The Red King's Deer

Hampshire

I'll tell you all a new one—and a true one. It happened to us in 5 952 when King George VI died. (No one but our family knows the tale.) When my granny was little (we lost her three years ago), she had an old great-uncle who had been a New Forest verderer all his life. He lived to be over ninety and remembered the press gangs and Riding Officers and Waterloo and he always said that when the reigning sovereign was going to die a huge red deer stag haunted the big tree which some people call the King's Tree, and say Will Rufus was killed there because the arrow was deflected on it. William Rufus was called the Red King and so Granny's great-uncle called the ghost deer the Red King's Deer and said you could tell by the size of its slots [footmarks] how heavy it was and how fast it was going. If it stood a little while then the death wouldn't come for nearly a year, but if it galloped it would be in a few weeks.

Granny's great-uncle said only four or five keepers had ever seen it through hundreds of years and they all died violent deaths, but they had all spoke of a big red deer stag—not a fallow buck. He also said the slots were

seen by keepers in 1820 when the mad old king died and then the next two kings, in 1830 and 1836.

My great-uncle was dead before Queen Victoria's death and Granny daren't go and look, but my father, who was very young, went and no one knew. He never told us until one day Granny was talking and then he said, 'I went when Teddy [Edward VII] was ill, and I was still a boy—the slots were there, and again for King George V. There wouldn't be any for the Duke of Windsor—he wasn't crowned and he's still alive. A huge, heavy red deer stag—got all his rights I should judge—and there aren't any his breed or size in the forest to my knowledge, even since the park deer got out after the War.'

Well, my mother and my sister and I just laughed but Granny didn't like it, nor did my father, but he never said much anyway.

It was such a joke we kept on and on just to tease them—then one day Mother jumped up and said she'd go and look for herself and so could we. Granny cried and I felt ashamed, but my sister called me and we hurried to catch up Mother who was a good walker.

We got there laughing at the joke, all three of us, but the fresh slots *were* there almost as big as an Exmoor royal stag—I've hunted that country and that stopped my laugh. Then my sister heard an angry snort near by. 'What's that?' she said. 'Buck in rut,' said Mother, 'we'd better move,' but it wasn't the right time of year.

Then we all heard it—the furious snort of a challenging big red deer stag like the Quantock ones we'd heard on the wireless—even my mother recognized it.

We all ran like young girls. I didn't think I could do it—I was forty then and Mother was sixty-one.

When the three of us got home and fell into armchairs Granny nodded and Father turned on the wireless, 'Perhaps you women won't contradict so much, now.' And the announcer said King George VI was seriously ill.

From a Hampshire W.I. member, Denman College, 1962. Her grandmother, whom she mentions, was born in 1875 and died at the age of eighty-eight.

NOTES This is a good traditional ghost story from Plantagenet times which could be all it claims —or it may of course be the result of a crowd of good listeners and preceding traditional ghost-tales from all over England. I myself was interested in the very matter-of-fact tale-teller and noted it down for possible hints of confirmation known elsewhere in the New Forest. I have met practically none up to now, but, as a matter of conjecture and/or coincidence, chance word came my way of a Hampshire W.I. member who was involved with her own family of four in a fatal car

crash abroad. This was less than a year after the tale was told publicly and all four dead were father, mother and two married daughters. It could look as if Truth be than Fiction here.

The recurrent death-omens of royalty are known all over Europe but is there a traditionally placed oak of immense age anywhere near the Rufus Stone?

24

Whippendell Woods

Hertfordshire

We lived on a barge when we were little kids and we used to run along the towpath and pick flowers, but once when the sun was going down we heard someone wailing—oh, it was dreadful and Mother called to us quick to come aboard and she bundled us into bed without a word.

She was terrible put about and she wouldn't let Dad moor a little further on as we usually did. We went on another mile though the old horse was tired and she wouldn't let Dad go out again when he did come in for his supper. He had to stay with us. And every time we passed through Cassionbury Park we made haste even in daylight and so did the other bargemen.

None of them liked it just there.

Years after, when I was married and had a home in London, I met one of the other bargemen's wives and she told me why.

'Did *you* ever hear someone call out?' I said.

'Yes,' she said. 'Horrible it was and it wailed "Whippendell !" and that's what those woods back of the golf-links are called. My kids went there once to pick bluebells and came back running like hell and begging their dad to get the horse to hurry up. "But don't whip 'un," she says crying like anything. "That's what it yelled at us—'hipundell !'" And then all the rest joins in and a fine time then Dad and me had with all that lot howling. Even now she's a grown woman our Em won't look at a bluebell. Turns her queer.

'Well, we had to live on our barge, bluebells or not, we'd got to be sailing up and down so I noses out the rights of it from a woman that had lived at one of the locks. I never told Dad or the kids.

‘She said there was a farmer who was a hard, cruel devil and his carter had ten kids. He was only a half-pint chap called Dell but his horses was a picture—didn’t matter how willing they worked, the farmer was after them with a long whip to make a bit more and you could hear him yell “Whip’un Dell I” all the time. The poor horses worked till they dropped dead, that’s why I wouldn’t tell this to Dad—he’d want to go after the farmer’s ghost with Captain’s whip, which I’ve never seen him use it yet, but he’d do it if he was roused.

‘Well, poor Dell he stood up to the farmer, ten kids or no, and got knocked down for his trouble, and the blow killed him. When the police came to catch the farmer he went barmy and ran into the fog and marsh and down to the river and made a hole in the water.’

She said, ‘That’s why ’tis called Whippendell Woods.’

From a barge-woman staying near Kings Langley, 1938.

NOTES This is a very typical name legend even in the early 1900s (place-name tales are generally earlier than 1900. I once heard of an unsuspecting picnic party in this area (1945 or 1950) whose outing ended in fright and flight, for they said they heard strange noises of shouting and splashing in water.

Whippendell Woods are near Cassionbury Park, Watford.

25

Gilsland’s Gry

Northumberland (Scots Border)

Gilfillan was a wicked, cruel devil of a cut-throat and night-rider that killed as he went.

Up to his elbows in blood the villain was and his heart was hard stone, and fifty was the score of his taken lives. Not a soul would meet up with him knowing his whereabouts; he was almost as clever as a gipsy at the lurking, but he never caught or robbed a Bosvil. They was too clever for him and that he didn’t like.

Kill as he went the wicked devil did: man, woman or little child, but the thought that he couldn’t catch a gipsy was a challenge and it irked his

pride.

And he hated them almost as much as he hated Gilsland's lord who had shot off the feathers on his hat and one ear with a gold earring on it. (And my grand-daddy's grand-daddy found the ear and the ring in the road and my mammy wears it now—fine lovely gold from Maple Durham maybe, for it brought him ill-luck.) But the Bosvils they just travelled away for a while and Gilfillan lost his earring and swore he'd pay Gilsland's lord one day, but he'd have to think how.

Gilsland's lord had a silky who cleaned the house-place, devilled and punched lazy serving-wenches and kept all shining clean. They could hear her silken gown rustle, and one or two glimpsed her yellow hair and they didn't wait to see more—nor would any Bosvil I can promise you.

Silky had a tree beyond the gates and she went at nights and sat there all shining like cold mist, and if any came near the house that was friends she lets them go by and their horses comes to Gilsland Hall in a cold sweat gallop. But if any meant bad to Gilsland's lord, Silky she strangles them.

Gilfillan the villain was very well aware of this and he doesn't like it a bit and he keeps a mile and more away. Silky puts the fear in his stony heart but Gilsland's lord still fills his mind, for he owns a fine gry—a grey galloway—that none could ride but Gilsland himself.

Many had tried, but not even Ryley Bosvil could sit the beauty. All the devils in the bad place, sir, is in that gry's heart and he has killed his thirty men—Bosvils among them.

So there was a pair of cruel creatures. Gilfillan the villain and the gry and Gilfillan is mad with the wish to steal and ride him but for the dread of Silky he has.

He becomes cruel mad with the longings and the whole hill country goes in bands for fear of his killing travellers. Then one evil day he cuts the throat of an old, blind Cooper and mauls the little girl-child that led him and leaves her to die and takes their coppers. The Bosvils finds the bodies of their Roman kin. From the far south these Coopers were, and they knows then Gilfillan's days is numbered.

Oh yes, they know it well.

For the Gipsy Queen and her Cooper tribe they knows when they came; and they left it to her who had lost her father and her little child, and no Romany will face the curse of such. So Gilfillan the villain is sitting all alone by his fire in the empty countryside, when he looks up and sees a

beautiful woman standing on the other side of his fire—very beautiful she is, with her long, black braids and heavy earrings and all loaded with the gold and gems of Maple Durham on her fingers and arms and round her white neck. At first he thinks she is Silky and goes froze with terror, and then he sees the clever Gipsy Queen's sharp knife, and still he can't move.

'I have not come to kill for my father's sake or my little child you murdered cruelly, for I go to my dear God's Church. But you shall listen and remember my words: you will never be hanged by a man and no beast will throw you. And in token of the truth of this, the Coopers have stolen away Gilsland's gry and roped him a short mile away, but they dare not back him. He has killed the two fine Black Stanley lads that got ropes on him. Now take him from them and ride him if you can.'

And she slips away into the dark night and Gilfillan finds he can move again. He doesn't rush to murder her and rive away her gold for he fears the clever gipsy, but have Gilsland's gry he will and ride it. The gipsy said no gry could throw him. So down into the Romany trap he rushes and flings himself on the gry's back and cuts the halter rope and the Bosvils and Coopers and Black Stanleys all runs from him and its hoofs, and heard him gallop away like a gale and they were very well satisfied with their plan.

That gry was off and away, swift as a gipsy's curse, up hill, over the rushing river, and leaping from crag to crag with deep waters running below, and the loose flapping halter rope whirls and coils round his wrists tighter than iron handcuffs, and then all Gilfillan could do is sit the gry as the gipsy had told him. The galloping left him no breath, nor eyes to see out for the wind filled them with streaming tears of cold, and the gry makes straight home to Gilsland and comes to a dead stop right under Silky's witch tree.

Then two long, cold slender hands reaches down and, oh so gently, takes hold round his thick neck. 'We can hold you here all night,' says Silky. 'You can't lift your tied hands to break my grip and it will get tighter gently, oh so gently, and slowly, oh so slowly, all through the long night.' Gilfillan tries to kick the gry on but it just moved quietly half a little pace, no more, and the long, cold hands tightens again, oh so gently.

As the sky grows paler, Silky's hands gives a sudden twist and the gry moved on and when the cock is crowing the gry comes speeding home to Gilsland Hall with a strangled man sitting safe on his back.

Told by a visiting parson from Carlisle, 1912. He first heard the tale from two Bosvil boys on a poaching outing in 1860, when he was twelve years old and a roamer too. The tale still lapses into gipsy phraseology at times, although in those pre-1914 times it was fashionable to write it down in a more literary manner than that of the spoken tale, and I think we were told it in a mixture of parson and Bosvil.

NOTES *Bosvil* is Romany for the name Boswell. The Boswells were a true Romany clan from Yorkshire who travelled the northern counties with the *Black Stanleys*, another true Romany clan, There are Bosvils at Kirk Yetholm too.
Gry—Romany for 'horse'.
Galloway—a small but strong breed of horse peculiar to Galloway.
Maple Durham—in Oxfordshire, where the treasure was found.
Silky—a north-country household spirit, part brownie, part ghost. There are several recorded tales of them which show them to be not entirely malignant.
Ryley Bosvil—a famous Yorkshire horse-dealer who hunted with the Regency bucks. He died in the 1850s.
Cooper—the name of another true Romany clan.
Two alternative titles to this tale are 'Gilfillan the Villain', and 'Up in the Witchery Tree'.

Sources of reference are Dora Yates, *Gypsy Folk-Tales* (1948), George Borrow, *Romano Lavo-Lil* (1874), Jim Phelan, *Wagon Wheels* (1951), various Russian, Bulgarian and Roumanian Folk-tales, and some of Walter Starkie's mid-European notes of the 1930s.

Six

Rhozzums

26 Two Ainsworth Tales
27 Adam and Biddy
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29 The Little Cup-maker
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26

Two Ainsworth Tales

Lancashire

(a) The Wash Mug

In Ainsworth there lived a family of wild young men and one of them was courting a pretty girl and her grandmother did all she could to keep the girl away from this young man. One night he came riding past the cottage determined to have his revenge, so he stopped and tapped with his whip on the bedroom window and the old woman leaned out and he said, ‘I’ve just heard in t’village there are some chaps coming to break your mug.’ The great earthenware mug stood on the stone slab outside the kitchen door

and it was the pride of the old lady's heart, so she said, 'Thank you kindly for telling me, I'll come down and take it in.' But he said, 'It'll be too late, here, lean out and I'll hand it up to you.' So she leaned out and he put it in her arms. As soon as she held it she realized it was too big to go through the window, but she heard him riding off and called after him, 'Come back, felly, come back, I can't hold it!' Then she said, 'Well, he was a good young felly whoever he was, but it'll ha' to go, it'll ha' to go.'

Told by Mary L. Deakin in the 1890s.

(b) The Workh'us Bed

Aye, it was Whalley workhouse and it were snowing hard, a chap went to workhouse and asked to be put up for t'neet, workhouse maister said, 'Nay lad, ah've nowheer ah can put thee, tha con have thi supper and then we'll see abaht it, but theer's nowheer for thee but t'mortuary.' 'Well,' he says, 'nobody'll hurt me theer.' 'All right, ah'll give thee a couple o' blankets and tha con make thisel as comfortable as tha con.' So he laid down on t'stone floor and he wrapped himself in t'blankets and it were *very* cauld and *very* draughty and he suddenly thowt, 'Yon chap in yon coffin, he's not feeling cawd and he doesn't feel t'draught, ah don't see why we shouldn't change places, however ah'll give him one blanket and ah'll have t'other.' So he laid down in t'coffin and fell fast asleep. Next morning workhouse maister came along and went to the bundle ont'floor wrapped up int'blanket and he says, 'Na lad, heer's thi porridge.' No answer. Touched him wi' his foot. 'Heer's thi porridge!' And a voice from t'coffin said, 'If he wean't have it, ah will!, And they found t'workhouse maister three days later—five miles off in a barn.

Told by Canon G. A. Deakin in the 19805. Both this and the previous tale were contributed by Mrs G. Rye of Weston-super-Mare, who is the daughter of Canon and Mary Deakin.

27

Adam and Biddy

Herefordshire

Adam and his wife Biddy lived at our old farm. Adam liked his cider and used to roll home drunk, so Biddy she meant to put a stop to it. She dressed in a sheet and went and stood under our great oak—it's still there—and and Adam came

'Who be you, then?' he

'I be Old Nick,' says Biddy in a deep voice.

'Oh ah, come on in,' says Adam. 'We got one of *your* family here as a wife.'

From a W.I. member, 1961, now living at Bradford-on-Tone.

28

Ghosts Don't Like Iron

Buckinghamshire

Fat Dolly were a dairy maid as liked the lads and went to work on a lonely old farm where there were no other maids kept and only one farmhand and he was a bit soft.

Still she reckoned he might do for a frolic. So she run out after a November milking-time and met up with him in the dark by the old barn door. She knows he'll just stand a-gawping so she gives him no chance.

'Oh Joseph,' she says, ''tis terrible dark these nights [Halloween] I am that frighted of ghosties,' and she clings a bit.

Joseph he found it a bit pleasing and he put an arm round her waist (and an armful she was too !). 'Oh!' she say, 'did you hear aught?' and she cling a bit closer. 'They say that a man killed hisself up there in the loft—do take a look, I'm all a-tremble !'

So they took a look in the black dark and summat rustled in the straw overhead.

This time Dolly squealed out and both her arms went round Joseph, so he couldn't hardly move but love were now making him valiant and he loosed her off and undone his hob-nailed boots. Ghosties don't like iron,'

he says. ‘There’s plenty of nails in my boot soles all in a crisscross. Leave a-hold of me and let me get a good heave.’

But not Dolly. She went clutching and squealing and there were a groan from the loft that so took Joseph aback he didn’t heave they boots so well as might be, for they come whizzing right back at the pair of them.

The right boot for Dolly and the left boot for Joseph, and they caught them both flat and knocked them both flat out too.

Then the poor old tramp climbed down the loft-ladder and hobbled off to the next farm where the hay-mow was peaceful, and the two of them come to themselves with a lovely pair of black eyes apiece.

Took a bit of explaining they black eyes did.

Told by a W.L.A. girl from Prestwood on a riding tour in 1938,

29

The Little Cup-maker

Somerset

There was a small silversmith in Wincanton and if he wasn’t tall he was neat fingered and he made fine dishes and cups. One night he was coming home after selling a grand one and in the dark he fell into a deep, wet ditch and he couldn’t reach to climb out so he shouted for help.

Then he heard a wavery voice and footsteps that wobbled so he yelled again.

‘Oo be you, then?’ came a hiccupy voice.

‘I’m the little cup-maker of Wincanton. Lend a hand to lift me out.

‘A *little* cup-maker!’ said the indignant voice. ‘Yew can bide where ‘ee be vor!’ And the drunkard staggered on.

Told at Wincanton W.I. in 1903.

30

The Butcher and the Tick-man

Durham

A butcher ‘ad a regular whee aawes wanted everythingk on tick. Chaak it hup, son,’ says ‘ee, ‘aa’ll pay ye afore long.’ The butcher says tu ‘eesell, ‘Aa’ll tak ye doon, ye’ll nat getten nee mair free dinnis fra hus.’

The tick-man cayem tu settle hup. The shop was empty. ‘What cheeor, Geordie?’ says ’ee. ‘What fettle the day? Aa brout the bairn wi’ hus, the wife’s oot, and shu says shu’ll bash ’is lug if ‘ees getten dorty.’

The butcher sharpened ‘is knife. ‘By yersell are ye the day?’

‘Aee, neebody wi’ hus, bar the bairn, neebody seed hus come hin neether,’ says ’ee.

‘Why, ye booger, if ye dinna pay hus, neebody u’ll see ye gang oot neether,’ says the butcher.

From Miss P. Hindson, Sunderland, 1968. She first heard it in Durham in 1930.

notes

regular regular customer

’ad had

whee = who

aawes = always

on tick; chaak it hup = chalk the price on (up) the board, to be paid in the future. Board and chalk used to hand on wall, and items ticked when paid.

aa = I

aa’ll = I’ll

eesell = himself

doon = down

brout = brought

cot = out

tak = take

nee mair = no more

what cheeor? = how are you?

dinnis = dinners

cayem = came

tu = to

what fettle? = how are

bairn = child

shu = she

bar = except

getten dotty = gets dirty

neebody = nobody

booger = burgher = townsman

neether = neither

gang oot = go out (see note below)

lug = ear *dinna* = do not

ace = aye = yes

Dialect picked up from children and parents at a school in the east end of Sunderland, which is a seaport frequented by seamen from many countries including Norway, Denmark, India, Java, Japan and Africa, whose speech affects the language. The library, which is in the town centre, on the way to the docks, displays these words on its portals

Admission Free
Eingang Frei [Norwegian]
Fri Engang [Danish]
Gang in Free [Sunderland dialect]

From Scots there comes *lang* (long), *dinna*, *mair*, and *bairn* (see glossary above). From Tyneside we have *lug*, *getten dorty*, *neebody*, and *booger.*

One quarter of the town near the docks speaks in dialect. The rest of the town speaks with a north-country inflection.

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